

16 poses to ease and prevent back pain

# yoga

JOURNAL

Key poses  
for balance  
and strength

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## Build core power

*A practice for  
strength in  
every pose*

## Energize your day

With our heart-  
opening sequence  
from cover model  
**Kino MacGregor**

## Yoga for athletes

**4** poses for fitness  
and stamina

## Spring refresh

Ayurveda for a healthy season

## Redefining yoga

New teaching  
styles that may  
surprise you

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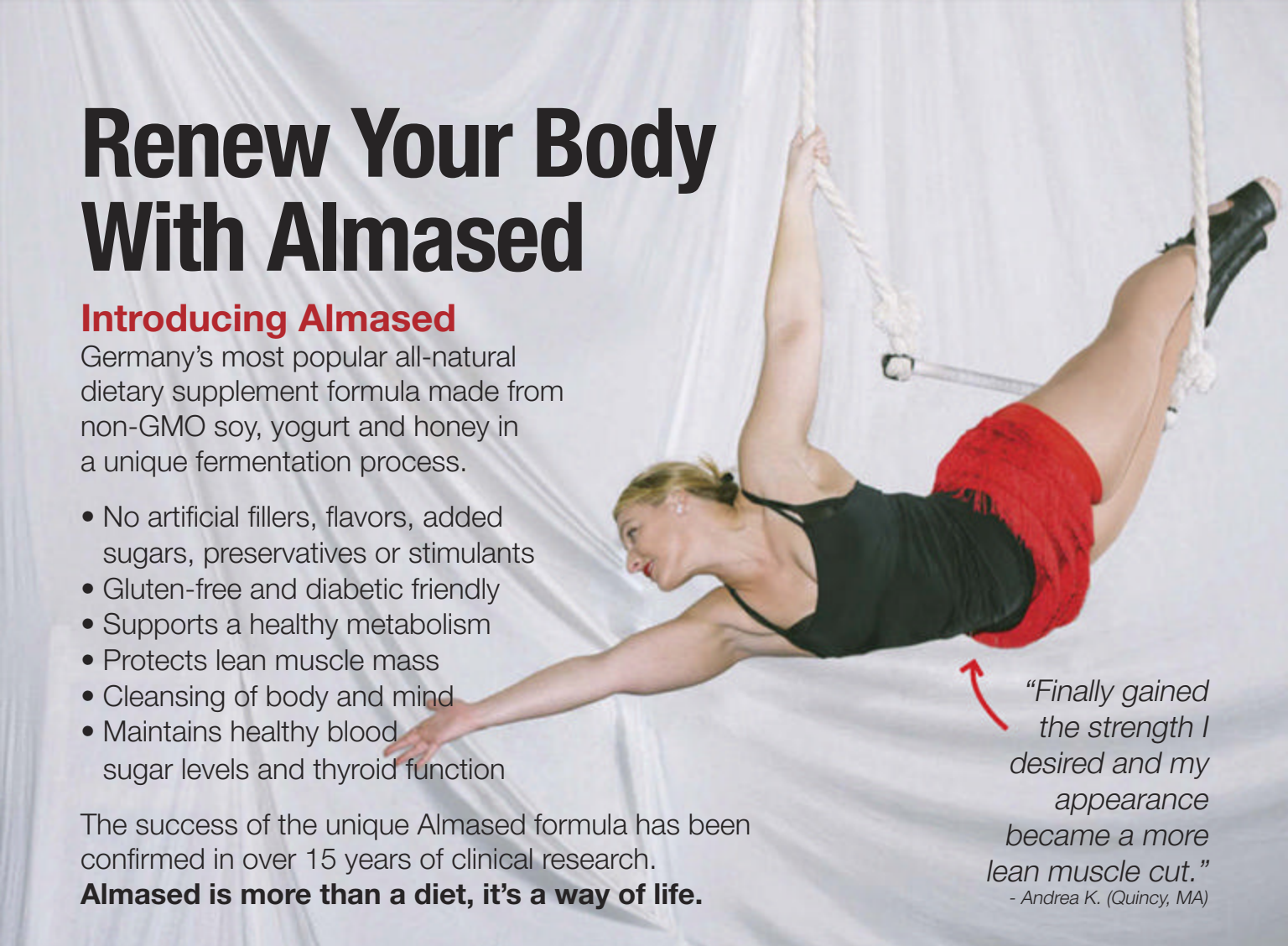
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Learn how to go from Ustrasana to Kapotasana with cover model Kino MacGregor on page 43.

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Find your new favorite yoga clothes, gear, and props—all of them manufactured with sustainable practices and materials you can feel good about, and all of them teacher-tested and -approved—in our annual green gear guide. **By Sally Wadyka**

### 78 Your Greatest Asset

Your glutes are the largest muscles in your body—and arguably the most important for supporting a strong and healthy yoga practice. Use these 7 poses from guest teacher Leslie Howard to help eliminate muscle asymmetries that can throw you and your practice off balance. **By Kate Siber**

### 86 Yoga Rebels

Used to be anyone who practiced yoga was considered a rebel. Today, these 5 teachers carry on the tradition of going against the grain, following their hearts to introduce new yoga forms that shake up classic paradigms. **By Melinda Dodd**

## ON THE COVER



**credits** Kino MacGregor in Paripurna Navasana; photographed by Jeff Nelson. Stylist: Emily Choi; hair/makeup: Laura Meyer/Alchemy Mineral Blends; top: Vimmia; bottoms: Onzie.

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PHOTO: JEFF NELSON; STYLIST: EMILY CHOI; HAIR/MAKEUP: PEGGY COX; TOP: KORAL ACTIVEWEAR; BOTTOMS: TEERI



# LIFE CHANGER

*To heal the world, we must first heal ourselves.*

– Seane Corn



Seane Corn

Celebrated yoga teacher, activist & co-founder of Off the Mat into the World



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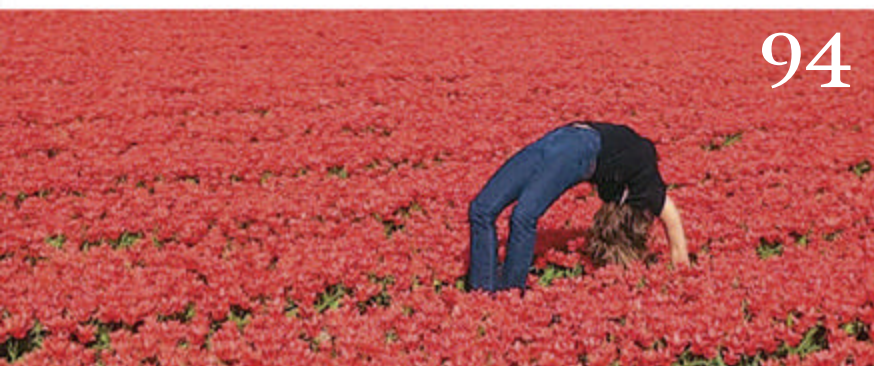
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### See the good

As part of our 40th anniversary celebration, *Yoga Journal* is proud to announce the Good Karma Awards, coming this September. We'll be honoring and thanking some of the most selfless yogis in our history and beyond who have utilized their yoga teachings to contribute to their community at large. Learn more and cast your vote in April at [yogajournal.com/40th](http://yogajournal.com/40th).

### GET YOUR PHILOSOPHY FIX

Join Sianna Sherman, founder of Mythic Yoga Flow, weekly on the [yogajournal.com](http://yogajournal.com) Namaste blog for her ideas for applying yogic philosophy to your daily life. Want more Sianna? Sign up for her new online course, The Goddess Project, at AIM Healthy U ([aimhealthyu.com](http://aimhealthyu.com)).

### IN SEARCH OF INSPIRATION?

Check out *Yoga Journal* and Naropa University's Life in Balance Lecture Series, featuring Sharon Salzberg, celebrated meditation teacher; Jeff Walker, philanthropist and co-author of *The Generosity Network*; and George Mumford, sports psychologist and mindfulness teacher for the New York Knicks. Join them in New York April 24 for a conversation about how yoga and mindfulness impact well-being, business, and even pro sports. Tickets \$20; [yjevents/ny](http://yjevents/ny).



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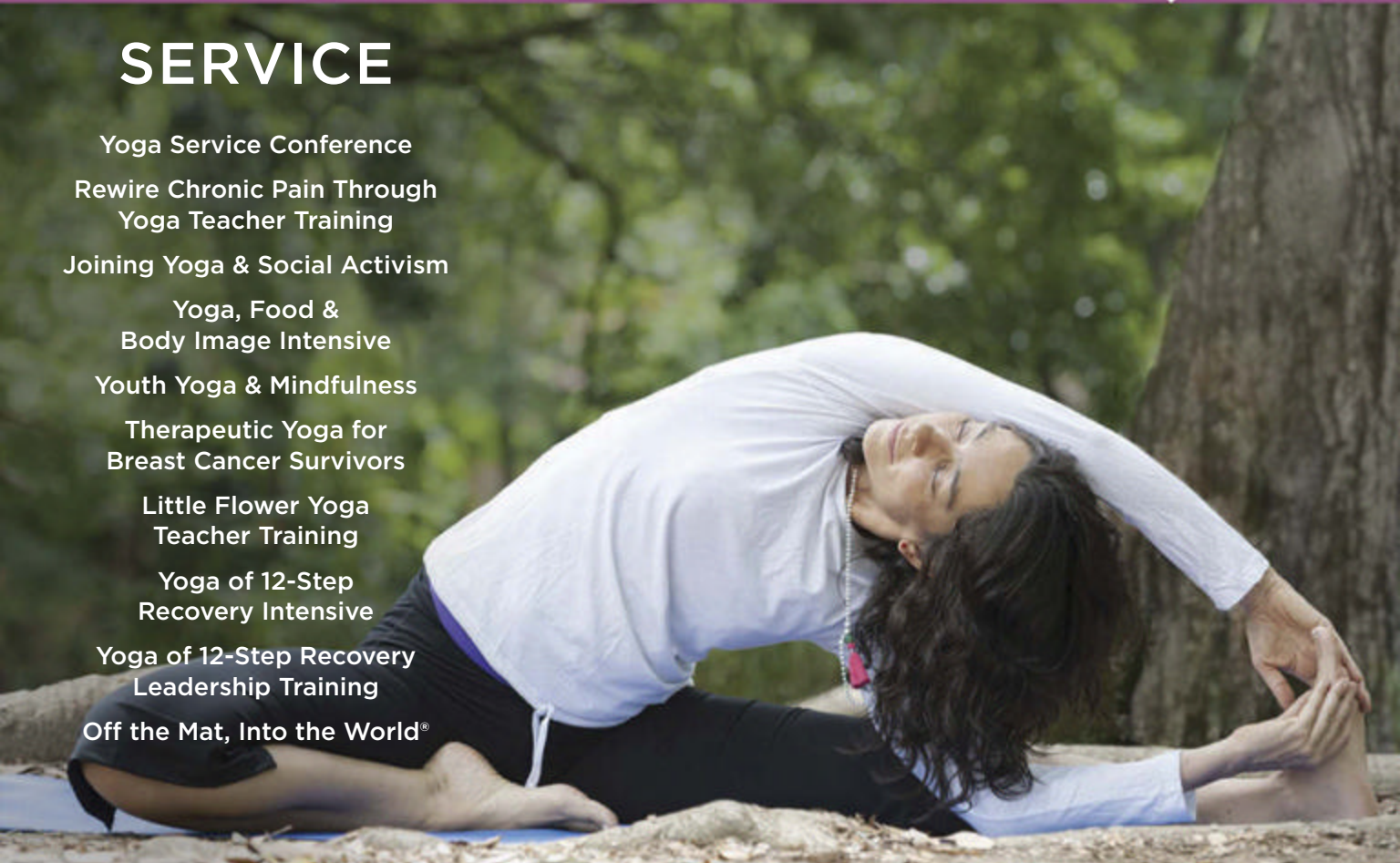
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# a climate for change

**IF YOU EVER** doubted global warming's existence, there's no denying it now. Even the notoriously contentious US Senate finally acknowledged its reality, voting 98-1 that climate change is "not a hoax" earlier this year. Yet many of these same senators continue to deny our role in climate change, voting against legislation that recognizes human activity like burning coal and oil as a contributing factor. On this, I side with the scientists and decades of research suggesting we are in fact at least partially to blame.

As I own my responsibility, I feel guilty and down, but also simultaneously hopeful: If our behavior got us into this mess, couldn't a conscientious change in behavior help get us out? I have to believe the answer is yes. And as yogis—practitioners of mindfulness and the principle of *ahimsa*, or nonharming—we are primed to not only embrace the charge for change but also to lead it. To that point, and in honor of the 45th anniversary of Earth Day this April 22, I dedicate this issue of *Yoga Journal* to Mother Earth.

Within these pages, you'll find a number of ideas for making your practice and life more eco-friendly. In "Green Your Practice" on page 72, we highlight 21 pieces of yoga clothing and gear made with sustainable practices and materials that also performed well when put to the test by our panel of yoga teachers. In "Good Catch" on page 65, award-winning writer Paul Greenberg discusses the latest science on sustainable fishing, and offers an easy-to-follow planet-savvy shopping guide for seafood eaters. You'll also find information about upcycled jewelry (page 15), green wine (page 16), eco-friendly beauty tools (page 20), and yoga gardens (page 100).

As always, we've also collaborated with several top yoga teachers to develop a number of sequences, pose instructions, and other insights to help you deepen your practice. I'm most excited to announce the launch of our new regular column, Body of Knowledge (page 50), in which each month an anatomy expert will focus on one specific body region and how you can keep it safe and strong on your mat. This month's lesson: wrists, with Ray Long, MD, orthopedic surgeon and founder of Bandha Yoga.

Finally, to help us celebrate *Yoga Journal's* 40th anniversary this year, I encourage you to visit [yogajournal.com/40th](http://yogajournal.com/40th) to learn about our first-ever Good Karma Awards coming this September, and to cast your vote. We're excited to honor just some of the yogis who are using their training to give back to society at large, and hope you'll join us in thanking them. For now, thank you for sharing your practice with us, and happy Earth Day!




Kino MacGregor was such an inspiration—she made every pose look easy!

*Carin*

**Carin Gorrell**  
Editor in Chief





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what's  
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## Sustainable Style

With the upcycling trend gaining momentum among jewelry makers, more accessories are now crafted with materials getting a second chance at life. The result: less clutter in landfills, and more beautiful feel-good baubles. "It is important for the environment," says Forrest Curran, founder of Purple Buddha Project, which makes necklaces, bracelets, and bangles from bullet shells and other munitions used in the Cambodian and Laotian civil wars. "People in Cambodia can't expand the land for farming because of bombs under the ground. Disarming and clearing the bombs allows for subsistence farming, the most basic of human economic actions." Below, four statement pieces inspired by sustainability. CELIA SHATZMAN

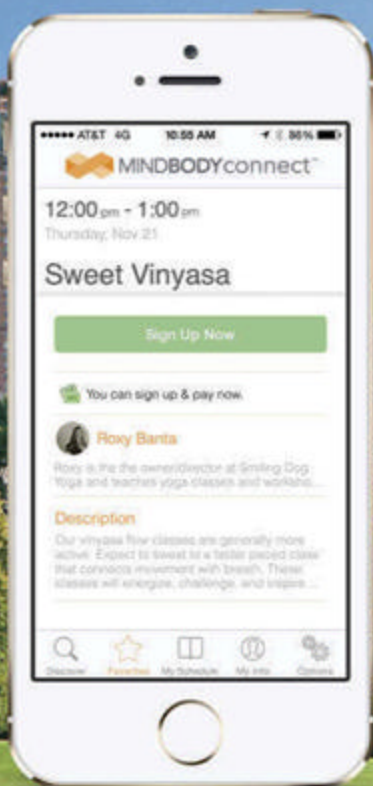
news  
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inspiration

From left to right: Jewelry for a Cause In Gratitude malas are handcrafted in Uganda from recycled-newspaper and barkcloth beads, and natural plant dye (\$60, [jewelryforacause.net](http://jewelryforacause.net)); Purple Buddha Project Om Bracelets and Bangles are made from discarded bullet casings and bombshells, and every purchase helps clear 3 cubic meters of bomb-littered land in Cambodia and Laos (\$35 each, [purplebuddhaproject.com](http://purplebuddhaproject.com)); Alkemie Sage Cuff is made by a husband-and-wife team in Los Angeles who use 100 percent reclaimed metal and donate 3 percent of each sale to the Seva Foundation or Save The Children (\$209, [alkemiejewelry.com](http://alkemiejewelry.com)); Upcycledjewelry Shop on Etsy crafts rings from old circuit boards and earrings from computer hard drives that are RoHS compliant, meaning they contain no lead, cadmium, or toxic heavy metals (\$18 per ring, \$25 for earrings; [etsy.com/shop/upcycledjewelry](http://etsy.com/shop/upcycledjewelry)).

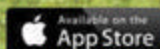


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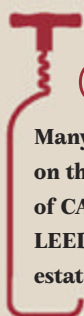
what's the buzz

## RACE relations

Yoga is incredibly healing—so it should be available to everyone, regardless of background, culture, or ability. That's the sentiment behind the second annual Yoga and Race Conference on April 10, sponsored by the University of California, Berkeley. Speakers will examine what it means to introduce yoga to underserved communities and how to break down barriers to studio entry. "Our biases and cultural stereotypes have created unequal access and a misunderstanding of the practice of yoga," says keynote speaker Dianne Bondy, RYT-500, founder and managing director of Yogasteya, a virtual studio that reaches students of all cultures, sizes, and abilities. On the 2015 horizon: A new journal from the University of California Press called *Race and Yoga*. For more information, visit [raceandyoga.com](http://raceandyoga.com).

20%

*The drop in likelihood that four-cup-a-day coffee drinkers will develop malignant melanoma. Caffeine, consumed or applied topically, has been shown to absorb UV rays, "functioning as a sunscreen," reports the Journal of the National Cancer Institute. That post-Savasana latte gets better every day.*



## GREEN WINE, DEFINED

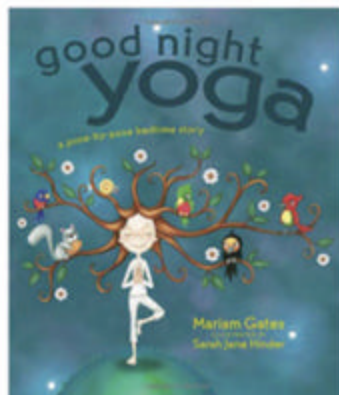
Many wines declare they're green, but what do the planet-positive claims on the bottle really mean? John Conover, partner in and general manager of CADE Estate Winery and general manager of PlumpJack Winery—the first LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Gold Certified estate winery in Napa Valley—breaks down the marketing buzzwords:

**100 percent organic:** The US government regulates use of the term "organic," requiring no commercial fertilizers, pesticides, fungicides, or herbicides be used.

**Biodynamic:** The vineyard is approached as an ecosystem and doesn't follow common manipulations like adding yeast or adjusting acidity in the wine.

**Sustainable:** It is one tier down from organic farming, meaning it's less restrictive—some herbicide is allowed, energy is conserved, and rain and winery wastewater are captured to irrigate the vineyards.

**Vegan:** During the winemaking process, everything is made without animal products like egg whites, which are sometimes used for "fining" or filtering wine.



## Child's Poses

Bedtime stories come to life with *Good Night Yoga: A Pose-by-Pose Bedtime Story* (available April 1), a charmingly illustrated book that tells the story of the earth settling down for the night while showing kids simple, relaxing poses. Author Mariam Gates, creator of the acclaimed Kid Power Yoga program, teaches children to calm their bodies and minds while moving from "Ladybug" (a squat) to "Cat" (an arch). (\$18, [amazon.com](http://amazon.com))



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## create SPACE

Minimalism has *arrived*, especially in home decor, and hands-on decluttering companies are helping those of us stuck in the aspirational stages. "Clutter drains us, by reminding us of everything that needs to be done," says Cary Telander Fortin, co-owner of the declutter and design service New Minimalism in San Francisco. "When it's gone, you feel free." Fortin's starter tips for paring down:

- Assess the organizing helpers you already own. Are they just more "stuff" (e.g., is your footwear swimming around an inefficient shoe rack; is that multi-binder system for recipes too complicated for your dozen go-tos)? Make peace with the money you spent by donating these items to charities or schools.
- Base your "keeps" on what brings you real happiness and value. Ask yourself, "Am I using this?" or, "Do I truly love it?" If both answers are "no," it's clutter.
- Immediately decide what you're keeping, returning, donating, or recycling as unplanned items come into the house. Postponing action on unwanted gifts, iffy purchases, and bundles of hand-me-downs creates piles on the floor or countertops, whereas decluttering in real time keeps your space consistently clear. NANCY RONES





# Green your routine

Made from recycled materials and without chemical preservatives or artificial fragrances, these beauty tools are our top picks for self-care and eco-friendliness.

By Brit Yeager

**1 Free People** Bamboo Compact Mirror by Gypsy Pea Magoo for Free People; \$24, [freepeople.com](http://freepeople.com)

While most pocket or purse mirrors are made of plastic, often laden with toxic chemicals, Gypsy Pea Magoo uses bamboo, which doesn't require pesticides, in this colorful compact. Its lightweight design and accompanying bamboo comb make it a convenient travel accessory.

**2 EcoTools** Lash & Brow Groomer Brush; \$3, [ecotools.com](http://ecotools.com)

EcoTools' eyelash and brow brush is made from eco-conscious materials, including a bamboo handle and recycled-aluminum reinforcements.

**3 Bodecare** Deluxe FSC Body Brush; \$40, [bodecare.com](http://bodecare.com)

Bodecare's brush removes dead skin cells with its porous Tampico plant bristles. Tampico is a more durable alternative to

nylon for removing surface particles. And the beechwood Bodecare uses is certified sustainable by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

**4 Soho Naturals** 6-piece Fresh Face Brush Set; \$17, [sohobeaute.com](http://sohobeaute.com)

This cosmetic-brush set features natural bamboo handles. As an alternative to hardwood, bamboo requires less water to reach maturation. Every set comes with a recycled-cloth travel case.

**5 Sephora** The Natural: Citrus Brush Cleaner; \$12, [sephora.com](http://sephora.com)

Sephora's natural brush cleaner uses a nontoxic formula that includes citrus oils to powerfully disinfect, condition, and clean all types of brush bristles without conventional chemicals and preservatives, such as parabens.





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LIVE WELL



FROM LEFT Tai chi at Red Mountain Resort; the scenic grounds; and a tempeh dish at the on-site restaurant.

# Find your bliss in St. George, Utah

By Gloria Dawson

**AS I PULLED UP TO** the Red Mountain Resort in southern Utah, I was greeted by a stunning, otherworldly landscape. The silty rust-colored mountains speckled with black petrified lava in next-door Snow Canyon State Park seemed to belong on Mars. It's hard to believe that the wild backdrop to this wellness retreat known for its group hikes, healthy-cooking workshops, and yoga classes is just a couple hours drive from the famously wicked Las Vegas.

After checking in, I took a leisurely walk—something that doesn't come naturally to this busy native New Yorker—on a short, circular path edged in stones before heading to my room for a whirlpool bath. Next up was an evening meditation class with Ian Phillip White, a certified Sivananda Yoga teacher and naturopath. He described the session as a choose-your-own-adventure meditation and offered four possible focal points: our breath, an image, a mantra, or a *mudra* (a symbolic gesture or hand position). I opted for a mantra of “let go” timed with my breath—in for “let,” out for “go.” I felt so calm and blissful afterward that I forgot I had started the same day in Manhattan.

After a few days of invigorating hikes and relaxing spa treatments, I rolled out my yoga mat on a flat landing of red rock for Ian's Canyon View Yoga Class. When I needed a *drishti*, or a focal point, I focused on the jagged edge of a spectacular cliff—so much more inspiring than the specks on the walls I use in yoga studios back home.

Although I'm now back to staring at those specks, and my meditative walks are along bustling 6th Ave, I've managed to bring a bit of Red Mountain Resort's calm home: I'm practicing focusing on my breath and letting go.

## PLAN YOUR TRIP

St. George must-dos:

### EXPLORE ZION

Located about an hour northeast of the resort, Zion National Park's 200-plus square miles are filled with lush forestland, breathtaking waterfalls, and arid sandstone cliffs that are perfect for scrambling up to take in the view ([nps.gov/zion](http://nps.gov/zion)).

### DINE LIGHT

The on-site Canyon Breeze Restaurant boasts lots of Southwest-inspired cuisine that leaves you satisfied but not stuffed. Order the habanero-mango shrimp or orange-glazed tempeh with red rice.

### HEAL WITH HONEY

After a vigorous hike or yoga class, opt for a Melting Honey Hot Stones Treatment at the resort's Sagestone Spa & Salon, featuring a honey tonic poured over your skin and a soothing massage with warm stones.



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## the upside of OUTSIDE

Spending a day in nature is a sure bet for a quick, short-term lift in mood, and now new research suggests a lasting link between the open air and happiness. In one study, people who moved to an area with abundant urban green space for three years experienced a boost in mental health throughout their tenure, while those who relocated where nature was sparser saw a mood decline. "We were surprised to see that the benefits in disposition appeared within the first year," says study co-author Mat White, MD, of the University of Exeter, whose findings were published in *Environmental Science & Technology*. "Our current work suggests that spending time around water environments—especially the coast—may be even more beneficial." Of course, you don't need to relocate to a forest cabin or beachside bungalow, says White. Take advantage of the nature near you: Make a date with your pooch for regular romps in the dog park, join a community garden, take your lunch break outdoors in the sun, or join an al fresco yoga class. CELIA SHATZMAN



## I'm afraid that Headstand will hurt my neck. When will I be ready to try?

Before practicing Headstand, you should be able to hold Downward Dog, Wide-Legged Forward Bend, Forearm Plank, and Dolphin for several minutes each. These poses indicate that you possess the proper strength and alignment, such as sustaining external shoulder rotation and having hamstring flexibility.

Headstand can improve upper-body strength, flexibility, digestion, and perhaps hormonal balance. But this pose also comes with risks, including damage to the cervical spine, if not performed properly. Contraindications include cervical disc and eye issues, and possibly high or extremely low blood pressure.

Alignment is key to practicing safely, so attempt your first Headstand with a trusted yoga teacher. To protect yourself, elongate muscles from your shoulder blades to your fingers to avoid placing weight in your neck; keep proper alignment by not popping out your ribs; and maintain a *drishti*, or focused gaze, on the wall behind you to balance. After Headstand, take Child's Pose and then Downward Dog to release back and neck tension.

**Annie Carpenter**

Founder of SmartFLOW Yoga, San Francisco

Answers to your questions about Headstand safety, nontoxic mats, spring allergies, and more.

## My new yoga mat smelled for several days after I unrolled it. Should I worry about off-gassing chemicals?

The smell of your new mat may not indicate that it contains toxic chemicals. Many mats that are free from harmful materials and dyes contain natural rubber, which can be pretty stinky at first. A better way to gauge the safety of your mat: Check its material. Yoga mats made with vinyl, or polyvinyl chloride (PVC), can contain chemicals like phthalates, which are used to make PVC flexible. Phthalates are linked to reproductive issues including shorter pregnancy duration and premature breast development in girls, and they can leach out over time, especially in warmer temperatures like those found in many hot yoga studios. Phthalate particles then cling to dust, which can be inhaled.

Although research specifically examining yoga mats is limited, studies of other household products made with PVC materials have found that they can emit chemicals that pollute the air. Also, in order to make yoga mats with PVC, potentially harmful chemicals like chlorine gas, ethylene dichloride, vinyl chloride, mercury, and dioxins may be used and released into the environment.

The good news: As awareness of potential PVC dangers grows, more companies are manufacturing mats without vinyl. Seek a mat that specifically says PVC-free, or look for mats made with safe materials like natural rubber or jute, such as Barefoot Yoga's Original Eco Yoga Mat, Manduka's eKO Mat, or Jade's Harmony Mat.

**Mike Schade**

Mind the Store campaign director for Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families, New York

## How can I keep my brain as limber as my body?

### SLEEP

A new analysis published in *Perspectives on Psychological Science* revealed that getting a good night's sleep when you're younger (18–60) benefits brain function later in life. And more important than meeting a quota of hours slept is getting deep sleep with few interruptions (like night waking). That way, the brain can better replay experiences and strengthen them for recollection.

## I get bad spring allergies. Can I reduce symptoms through diet?

You can help bolster your body's defenses—and minimize symptoms—by eating foods that increase “good” bacteria in your gut. Some research shows that good gut microbes support a healthy inflammation response by signaling your immune system to attack only harmful pathogens, rather than overreact to particles like pollen and dust. Start by incorporating fermented foods like miso, kimchi or sauerkraut, and kombucha into your diet to help build your good gut bacteria.

To keep “bad” bacteria from prospering in your gut, eliminate sugar-containing foods, such as refined carbohydrates (white bread, white rice, sugary cereals), processed foods, and alcohol (like beer and wine). The reason: Sugars feed bad bacteria and suppress the good kind. And consider cutting back on dairy, which can worsen allergy-induced congestion for some people.

**Aicacia Young, RD**

Austin, Texas

## Have questions for the experts?

Send them to [letters@yogajournal.com](mailto:letters@yogajournal.com)



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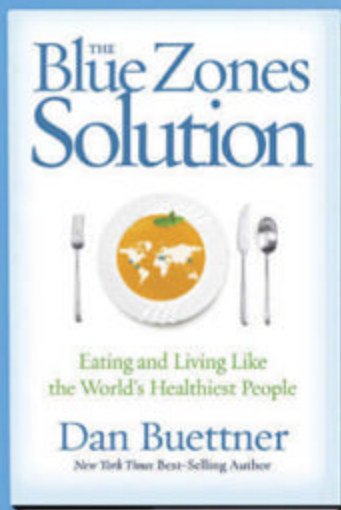
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## Spring into a new season

By Scott Blossom

**AS SIGNS OF SPRINGTIME**—renewal, warmth, and expansion—emerge, you may still feel stuck in the cold and heaviness of winter, fighting sleepiness and possibly extra weight from the holidays and being holed up. Or, you may feel worn out from battling budding allergies, rather than energized and ready for the new season. But adopting these simple time-tested Ayurvedic self-care practices for balancing, purifying, and rejuvenating the body and mind can help you fully prepare for and enjoy the dynamism of spring.

**Add turmeric** This common kitchen herb has potent healing properties. A 2014 meta-study in the journal *Biotechnology Advances* tallied more than 6,000 articles about its antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, antiviral, and anticancer activities. Make a cup of morning tea using ¼ tsp each of ginger and turmeric powder to wake up your digestive system and soothe aches and pains. Turmeric is also effective at drying mucus and soothing irritation associated with allergies and colds. To tackle the sniffles, take ½ tsp of turmeric powder with equal parts raw honey, used to help clear phlegm, three times a day.

**Rinse your sinuses** Using a neti pot, a teapot of sorts that helps you pour saline solution through your nasal and sinus cavities, can clear cold- and allergy-related sinus issues. The saline solution, prepared with 8 ounces distilled water and ½ tsp noniodized mineral or sea salt, helps tiny hair-like structures called cilia sweep out dust, germs, allergens, and mucus. Fill the pot with solution, and stand over a sink. Place the spout in one nostril, and tip your head back and slightly to the side until the solution starts to drain out your other nostril. If you are really congested, gently drain the saline solution out the same nostril into which you poured it.

**Eat your greens** The spring harvest includes important foods for promoting a healthy liver, colon, and lymphatic and immune systems, all of which can become stagnant when you spend a lot of time indoors. Dandelions start popping up this season, and both the leaf and root are excellent for purifying digestive organs. The Italians make an excellent dish by sautéing garlic and dandelion greens in olive oil. If you find the taste too bitter, substitute with kale or spinach, which also pack in fiber, minerals, and antioxidants that promote elimination.

**Practice peace, love, and understanding** One of the most powerful ways to feel in sync with the change of seasons is to work on lingering issues in your relationships. In winter, we go inside ourselves, but spring encourages us to open up again, and that includes opening up to new possibilities in our relationships. Make a list of loved ones with whom you would like to clear the air or just reconnect, and reach out to them. Forgiveness, peacemaking, and understanding will help lift emotional heaviness and ensure a joyful spring!

Scott Blossom is a traditional Chinese medical practitioner, Shadow Yoga teacher, and Ayurvedic consultant. Learn more at [DoctorBlossom.com](http://DoctorBlossom.com).



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# Does *ahimsa* mean I can't eat meat?

Practicing the principle of nonharming can trigger dissonance in omnivores. Here, thoughts on reconciling your diet with your practice. By Kate Holcombe

**FOR SEVERAL YEARS** in the 1990s, I lived in Chennai, India, and had the privilege of studying every day with the great yoga master T.K.V. Desikachar. One day, a young man from France was brought in for a consultation with Mr. Desikachar. This man was very eager to learn yoga and had committed himself to staying in India and studying for several months. But his health had been declining since his arrival in India, and after a few weeks, he had lost quite a bit of weight, had become very pale and weak, and was unable to focus on his studies.

During Mr. Desikachar's evaluation of this young man, he asked him about his diet, and most specifically, if he ate meat.

"Why, no, sir, of course not," the man replied.

"Why do you say 'of course not'?" inquired Mr. Desikachar.

"Because I want to be a yoga teacher," he said, "and everyone knows that yoga teachers cannot eat meat."

The young student reflected a belief of many yoga teachers and students today that yoga somehow forbids eating meat. Many who have studied Patanjali's Yoga Sutra, widely considered the authoritative text of yoga, equate the concept of *ahimsa*, or nonharming, with vegetarianism. It's natural for those who study yoga to try to adopt an entire lifestyle that reflects their new commitment to conscious living and mental and physical balance.

But according to the Yoga Sutra, you don't have to become a vegetarian. The confusion stems in part from a misinterpretation of *ahimsa*, combined with the fact that the first generation of yoga teachers in the United States mostly studied with teachers—such as Sri Desikachar, Swami Satchidananda, B.K.S. Iyengar, and Sri Pattabhi Jois—who, being culturally Indian and Brahmin, tended to be vegetarian. So an idea has developed in the yoga community that conflates yoga with vegetarianism. But the practice of *ahimsa* is not as simple as that.

## Assess the damage

*Ahimsa* (sutra II:30) is the first of five social and environmental guidelines, called *yamas*, presented by Patanjali in the second chapter of the Yoga Sutra. The *yamas* are the first of eight "limbs," or means, to help you reach a state of yoga, or focused concentration, in order to perceive more clearly, be more con-



nected with your authentic Self, and suffer less as a result.

The *yamas* consist of five components: *ahimsa* (nonharming), *satya* (the truth that doesn't hurt), *asteya* (noncovetousness), *brahmacharya* (appropriate relationships and boundaries), and *aparigraha* (only accepting what is appropriate).

As I tell my students, these guidelines help us differentiate between the ever-changing, impermanent mind and what Patanjali describes as the part of us that is pure, perfect, unchanging, and permanent: our own true, authentic Self. By differentiating between the two, we can act from a place of our authentic Self (instead of from the mind), and therefore experience less suffering.

In the case of the French yoga student, Mr. Desikachar looked him in the eye and asked, "Have you considered the harm you are doing to yourself by not eating meat?" He said this young man was not getting the adequate nutrients for his body type, and that the Indian vegetarian diet was not serving him—and was, in fact, harming him. He then advised the man to start eating some chicken or fish right away and to have at least two servings a day.

## Consider yourself

Now, of course, Desikachar was not saying that everyone who is vegetarian is causing harm to himself—Desikachar himself is a vegetarian—but for this particular student, vegetarianism was not the optimal or most supportive diet. And when practicing *ahimsa*,





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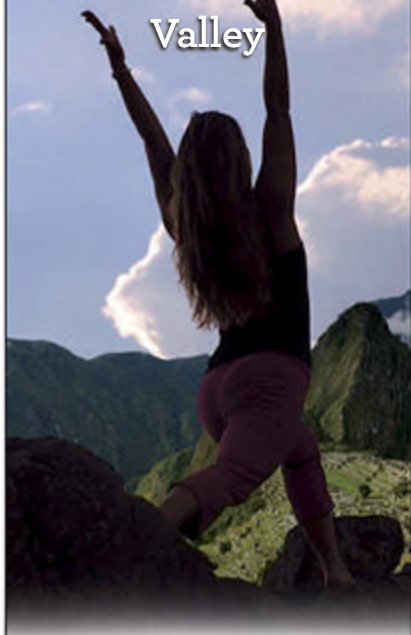
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## be well WISDOM

the concept of nonharming must also apply to oneself—whether we are referring to our interactions with others, our relationships, or our occupation. While the Yoga Sutra is designed as a universal text, it must always be adapted to the individual.

After offering the student his “prescription,” Desikachar went on to explain the often forgotten and misunderstood next sutra, which immediately follows ahimsa and the yamas in II.30:

*II.31 jati desa kala samaya anavichinna sarvabhaumah mahavratam*

In this sutra, Patanjali acknowledges that only those very rare beings in all the worlds (*sarvabhaumah*) who have taken a “great vow” (*mahavratam*) are able to practice all five yamas without interruption (*vicchinna*), while—and this is key—the rest of us must adapt these guidelines to our current occupation (*jati*), the place we live (*desa*), time of day, month, or year (*kala*), or circumstance (*samaya*).

For example, if one who made his living (*jati*) fishing adhered firmly to the yamas without sutra II.31, he would not be able to practice ahimsa unless he gave up his occupation, and hence harmed his family or himself by not being able to provide. Similarly, in the place where you live (*desa*), fresh vegetables may not be available year-round, and it may be better for your health to supplement your diet with meat. Likewise, depending on the time of year (*kala*), eating meat may be more beneficial, or in the case of the young man from France, his circumstance (*samaya*) meant that eating meat was the less harmful choice for his well-being.

### Adapt to your circumstance

I’ve had to embrace this concept in my own life. I had been an ovo-lacto vegetarian for more than a decade when I became pregnant with my third child. Suddenly, I found myself craving red meat. For several weeks, I resisted eating it because it went against my convictions. I had initially become a vegetarian after learning of the environmental impact of overfishing and factory trawling, the depletion of land and water resources due to animal agriculture, and the greenhouse-gas effects of raising cattle. But I researched where to find organic, hormone-free, grass-fed beef (that was raised as humanely and environmentally

# 4 steps to cultivate ahimsa

Take a few moments each day to check in with yourself and cultivate ahimsa, both for yourself and for others in your life.

## 1 Sit

Sit quietly in your home, in your parked car, or even on the bus or in the waiting room of the doctor’s office and bring your awareness to your breath.

## 2 Observe

Observe the quality and comfort of the breath without judgment. Does it feel rapid and short? Strained and heavy? Shallow and quiet? Smooth and steady? Observing yourself (your breath, your sensations, your thoughts, your energy level, and so on) without judgment is the first step toward being gentle with yourself and directing the attitude of ahimsa inward.

responsibly as possible) and ate a half a hamburger. At my next prenatal appointment a month later, my doctor informed me that I was extremely anemic, in spite of the iron supplements I had been taking, and she encouraged me to eat red meat more regularly—confirming that my cravings were telling me what my body needed, and that by not eating meat I was doing myself (and possibly my baby) harm.

When it comes to your diet and practicing ahimsa, there are many ways to incorporate meat while staying true to the Yoga Sutra. Perhaps for you, the right approach is to eat meat only on certain days of the week or year. Or maybe the way the meat is fished or harvested is important to you. Or perhaps you will say a prayer of thanks to the animal that has given its life for your sustenance, nourishment, and enjoyment.



### 3 Breathe

After a few moments of simply observing the breath, relax your abdomen and shift your breathing to gentle abdominal breaths, allowing the belly to expand on the inhale, and softly contract on its own on the exhale, with nothing forced or strained. With each breath, remind yourself that you are all right just as you are. You may be struggling or going through challenges, but right now, you are just right. Remind yourself that yoga is an ongoing practice and that the practice of personal growth is not always easy.

### 4 Reflect

Now reflect on ways you might support or be kinder or gentler to yourself: They could include taking a quiet walk, spending time with your dog or a friend, or taking a hot bath. And remember, even these few moments of breathing and reflection are a practice of kindness and gentleness. From this place of cultivating ahimsa toward yourself, and checking in with yourself without judgment, you will better be able to manage any challenges that come your way and respond to others in the world and in your life from a place of understanding, one that comes from being connected to that quiet inner resource of your own, true, authentic Self.

Ultimately, this consciousness and attention are what we hope for in our practice—to care for ourselves and for others around us, to be present with our actions, and to make conscious and thoughtful choices (rather than reacting without thought, which often leads to suffering). If we are not practicing the principles outlined in the yamas with ourselves, how can we expect to authentically live them and direct them toward others? When we apply the yamas to ourselves as well as to others, we are taking the best possible care of ourselves and doing our own important work in this process of personal growth and transformation. 🧘

Kate Holcombe is a yoga therapist and founder and director of the Healing Yoga Foundation in San Francisco.



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an  
interview  
with

# jacoby ballard

A yoga teacher reveals ways to transform your personal struggles into an opportunity for healing others.

By Seane Corn

Jacoby Ballard adjusts a yoga student at the Third Root Community Health Center.

*This is the third in a yearlong series of interviews conducted by guest editor Seane Corn, founder of the yoga service organization Off the Mat, Into the World, each featuring a different leader in yoga service and social-justice work. Everyone profiled here will join Corn in teaching a workshop on yoga for social change at Yoga Journal LIVE! in Estes Park, Colorado, September 27–30. This month, Corn interviews Jacoby Ballard, a trans yoga and Buddhism teacher and co-founder of the Third Root Community Health Center in Brooklyn.*

**SEANE CORN** Tell me about your personal journey and what brought you to yoga and Buddhism.

**JACOBY BALLARD** I came into yoga as a jock [in college]. Luckily, my first teacher slowed me down and taught me about the philosophy of yoga, and that hooked me. I was asked to teach yoga at the college, and one of my classes was for the school's administrators. That's when I fell in love with teaching, because the administrators brought their real life into the yoga classroom. They came to me and to yoga to heal and for

resilience to make it through divorce, hysterectomies, suicides of a couple of their kids—some deep, hard, traumatic things. I got certified at Kashi Atlanta Ashram in 2004, and there was a LGBTIQQ [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Queer and Questioning] presence there. I was already out as queer. After my teacher training, I came out as trans as a result of immersing myself in yoga and the ashram. I went into yoga spaces and tried to be my full self, but I also met resistance, ignorance, and, sometimes, hostility. When I look back, I see it as transphobia. The yoga world is a reflection of the rest of the world, and so whatever is prevalent in our society shows up not only on our mats personally but in the space collectively.

**SC** At present, how do you support the trans community and others who are typically underrepresented in the yoga studio?

**JB** In 2008, I co-founded Third Root Community Health Center ([thirdroot.org](http://thirdroot.org)), a worker-owned cooperative. The six owners vary across race, size, disability, age, gender, and

*continued on page 36*

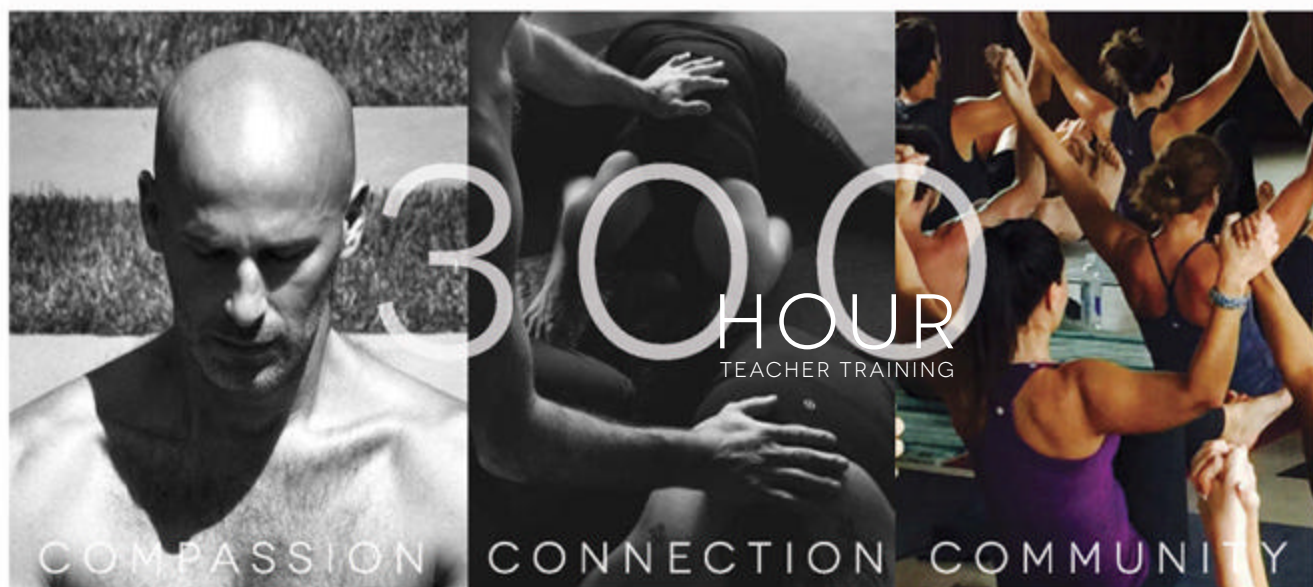


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## be well GAME CHANGERS

*continued from page 34*

gender identity. We have offered various classes for specific communities—yoga for abundant bodies, queer and trans yoga, yoga for people of color, and yoga for survivors of sexual violence. Sometimes we need to just be around our own in order to heal and not face the injustice in the world. It is not about exclusion, but creating intentional space to heal.

I also try to show up at trainings and retreats as myself and know that my presence there enables other trans people's presence, as well as influencing others. I'm interested not in inclusion but in transformation, changing the whole game: giving a voice in leadership to yogis who are not often given the mic; giving support, guidance, and mentorship to emerging leaders from different communities so that they don't fail; and being in solidarity with one another so that all of us ultimately have access to happiness and the goals of all the teachings of yoga.

**SC** *What is the vision of the diversity training you offer to yoga teachers?*

**JB** The bigger vision of diversity training is to have all yoga teachers be trained as agents of social change and as change-makers. An immediate goal is to reduce harm that yoga teachers perpetuate out of ignorance, out of a lack of training, out of not having relationships with various communities. They may not know what hurts people or the language that honors them or respects them and their histories. Another goal is to model what alliance, courage, and honesty can look like between the facilitators, who are from different backgrounds and life experiences. Every day, yoga teachers have a pedestal to speak from—and that is an opportunity to truly honor all of humanity.

**SC** *What is your personal experience with harm created by yoga teachers?*

**JB** One experience that includes healing is having been in a yoga classroom where the teacher was talking about the benefits of a squat and the contraindications for the pose. At first, he said the squat is really great for pregnant people. I was so relieved he was not gendering pregnancy because I know lots of transmen who are and have

been and will be pregnant. Then, the teacher said he meant *women* who are pregnant, and the whole room—200 students—started laughing at the notion of a pregnant man. I felt like the whole room was laughing at me and my community.

I stayed in the practice, and afterward, I approached the teacher and told him that

I felt hurt by the comment and like I didn't belong in the room, and that when everyone was laughing, they didn't want me in the room either. Because of our shared practice and because of my tone, he was able to receive me well and understand what I said, and he started crying. He had harmed me, and yet we hugged. There was beautiful forgiveness in that moment. Teachers are not

always that open to feedback about their language or adjustments.

**SC** *Can you give examples of supportive rather than oppressive techniques for teachers?*

**JB** I ask people's permission to touch their bodies. In Child's Pose, I ask them to wave a hand if they don't want to be touched. Also, someone who doesn't want to be touched won't necessarily raise a hand, so I have to be aware of their body language and their breath. When I'm first touching someone, I try to come into their sphere [of vision]. I'm not coming from the back and surprising them; I try to make my presence known in some kind of vocal way. Then I watch their breath because one of the signs of trauma is holding the breath or having a heavy breath.

**SC** *What have you learned in doing social-justice work at Third Root?*

**JB** I've learned to keep at it and to not give up just because things get hard. Out of commitment to the work and commitment to each other, we have to keep coming back to practices of solidarity and alliance, introspection and awareness.

**SC** *How has this helped your own yoga, your own healing, and your own experiences as a man in the world?*

**JB** I've learned to stay with my practice, and that my practice is the most grounding thing I have. It exists everywhere that I exist, and I take refuge there through all the sorrows and joys in my life. 🙏



### LEARN MORE

To read more of this interview and all of *Yoga Journal's* Game Changers and their teachings, visit [yogajournal.com/gamechangers](http://yogajournal.com/gamechangers)





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# practice

## WELL

### *flow in the* **DARK**

Search #glowga on Instagram and you'll see hundreds of yogis illuminated by only black and neon lights practicing across the country. More and more studios are offering uniquely lit experiences to students, from rhythmic black-light vinyasa and Bikram to playful practices accompanied by rock beats and glow-stick necklaces and bracelets. "These sessions speak to everyone in a unique and different way, allowing external stimuli to enhance your internal experience," says yoga instructor Goldie Graham ([goldieyoga.com](http://goldieyoga.com)) of Spirit Yoga in San Diego, California. The allure: Unlike a typical class, practicing in near darkness makes you more cognizant of your surroundings—your brain relies on heightened awareness from senses other than vision to process sensory information in order to stay balanced. If it feels like a fit, glow for it! YELENA MOROZ

Seven hundred yogis get their glow on in Copley Square, Boston.



poses  
for

By Sarita Lou

# dancing

A **YOGA MAT** can sometimes feel small and restrictive to dancers, accustomed as they are to moving across the expanse of a room or a stage, but rolling out a mat regularly can lead to better dance performances. Dancers—no matter their style—who practice yoga stand to gain muscle strength, joint stability, and inner focus for their work. While a dancer's range of motion is much greater than average, flexibility does not ensure proper alignment in poses and could result in injury, so take it slow and listen to instructions. Get started with this short sequence that honors a dancer's impulse for expression and creativity while requiring thoughtful form.

## Adho Mukha Svanasana, variation (Three-Legged Downward-Facing Dog)

**GOOD FOR** Stretching the hands, wrists, shoulders, and hamstrings; calming the mind

From Downward-Facing Dog, energize your quadriceps by lifting your kneecaps. Firm your arms, gaze toward your bellybutton, and lengthen your spine by reaching your tailbone toward the ceiling. On an inhale, lift a leg up, toes facing down, and spiral your upper thighs toward one another. Square your hips and press the bottom foot into the floor. Hold for 1 minute, keeping your breath fluid. Lower your leg; switch sides.

## Plank Pose, variation

**GOOD FOR** Toning the back, core, and arm muscles; improving stamina

From Three-Legged Down Dog, exhale and round your spine as you draw your lifted knee toward your chest, positioning your shoulders over your wrists. Inhale to round your upper spine toward the ceiling, drawing your bellybutton upward. Bring your lifted thigh close to your chest. Inhale back to Three-Legged Down Dog. Do 3 reps. Lower leg; switch sides.

## Vasisthasana (Side Plank Pose)

**GOOD FOR** Strengthening arm, core, inner-thigh, and back muscles; improving balance

From Down Dog, shift onto the outside edge of your right foot and stack your left foot on top of the right. Swing your left hand onto your left hip, turn your torso to the left, and support the weight of your body on the outer right foot and right hand. Firm your shoulders against your back; make sure right wrist is under shoulders. Extend your left arm to the sky and gaze up. Hold for 15–30 seconds. Lower back to Down Dog; switch sides.

## Side Plank Pose, variation

**GOOD FOR** Toning oblique and inner-thigh muscles; increasing coordination

From Side Plank on the right side, shift your weight onto your left foot and bring your right leg forward so your right foot is almost in line with your hips at a 90-degree angle. Gaze up at your left hand. Hold for 15–30 seconds. Exit the pose by coming back to Down Dog. Switch sides.

1



2



3



4



**OUR PROS** Teacher **Sarita Lou** is a New York City–based dance and yoga teacher and creator of the web series *For the Love of Dance*. Model **Lucy Wallace** is the owner of Alchemy of Movement studio in Boulder, Colorado, which offers dance classes that incorporate yoga.

PHOTOS: RICK CUMMINGS; MODEL: LUCY WALLACE;  
STYLIST: EMILY CHOI; HAIR/MAKEUP: BETH WALKER;  
CLOTHING: DANCING; TOP: HARDTAIL FOREVER;  
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# Poses of the month

How to move from  
Ustrasana to Kapotasana

By Kino MacGregor

## Ustrasana

ustra = camel · asana = pose

Camel Pose

### Benefit

Strengthens the back; opens the shoulders, chest, and quadriceps; boosts mood and energy

### Instruction

1 Come to your knees, with your legs hip-width apart. Place your hands on your hips, with your thumbs on your sacrum, the bony plate at the base of your spine. Keep your hips over your knees and internally rotate your thighs, squeezing them toward each other.

2 Inhale to engage your lower belly and reach your tailbone toward your knees, creating space between your lower vertebrae.

3 On another inhalation, lift your sternum and draw your elbows toward each other, allowing your rib cage to expand.

4 Keep your chest raised, your core engaged, your spine long, and your chin tucked as you drop your hands toward your heels.

5 Press the heels of your hands into the heels of your feet while draping the fingers over the soles. Keep lifting through your sternum.

6 Now lift your shoulders to allow the trapezius muscles between the shoulder blades to rise up and cushion your cervical spine. Gently lower the head and neck and gaze at the tip of your nose.

7 To exit the posture, bring your chin back toward your chest and your hands to your hips with your thumbs on your sacrum. Engage your lower belly and use your hands to support your lower back as you come up slowly.

OUR PRO Teacher and model **Kino MacGregor** is a certified Ashtanga Yoga teacher; the author and producer of multiple yoga books, DVDs, and online courses; co-founder of Miami Life Center; and founder of *Miami Yoga Magazine*. Learn more at [kinoyoga.com](http://kinoyoga.com) and [@kinoyoga](https://www.instagram.com/kinoyoga).



**DON'T** pinch the shoulders together, tensing the neck.



**DON'T** crunch the lower back by squeezing the butt, pushing the knees wider than hip-width apart, or pooching the belly.

Ustrasana

Ustrasana  
modifications,  
page 44

Kapotasana prep,  
pages 46-47

Kapotasana,  
pages 48-49

## Modify Ustrasana if needed to find safe alignment for your body.



If you don't have the spinal flexibility or core strength for full Ustrasana...

**TRY** keeping your thumbs on your sacrum and avoid reaching for your feet. Engage your inner thighs and pelvic floor by pulling your lower belly up and in. Stay here for 5 breaths, focusing on creating space between your vertebrae, opening your chest and shoulders, and building the muscular support needed for a deeper spinal extension. Lengthen with each inhalation, and on each exhalation, keep the space that you have created while engaging the core more.



If you feel lower-back strain or compression in full Ustrasana...

**TRY** curling your toes under and bringing your fingertips to your heels, lessening the degree of spinal extension. Start by pressing your thumbs into your sacrum, engaging your core, and lengthening the tailbone toward the floor. Then reach your arms symmetrically toward your heels. Remain here for 5 deep breaths, making sure to not drop your head back or attempt the final shoulder position unless you feel completely safe and stable.



If you can't keep your hips stacked over your knees, or if your breath is shallow...

**TRY** pressing your thighs against a wall and keeping your chin tucked into your chest. Stack your hips over your knees and bring your thighs to the wall. With your thumbs pressing into your sacrum, inhale to lengthen your spine and lift your sternum. Exhale to engage your lower belly, lengthen your tailbone, and lift your chin. If you feel you can take your backbend farther, drape your arms back and reach for your heels. If you are having trouble breathing, avoid lowering the head all the way back to keep airways fully open. Try not to strain, and hold for 5 deep breaths.

## FOCUS INWARD

Backbending is a journey into the nervous system and all of the emotions our nerves and sense organs can trigger—from fear to elation. When practiced slowly and safely, backbends like Ustrasana and Kapotasana have the power to reset your response to stress. Backbending trains the mind to remain equanimous in the face of adversity, requiring you to move carefully as you work with the limitations of your body and mind. As you extend your spine backward, you have to learn to distinguish between muscular and emotional intensity and between safe physical challenges and unsafe joint pain. Use your breath to cultivate a clear, calm mind, which can help you focus on and detect subtle sensations, such as strain within, rather than letting your ego be the driver of your asana practice, which can force your body into an aesthetic shape for which you may not be ready.



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Continue to open your hips and shoulders, and ease into backbending, with these **prep poses** for Kapotasana.

### Anjaneyasana (Low Lunge)

#### Benefit

Stretches the hip flexors and core and strengthens the back and quadriceps

#### Instruction

From Tadasana (Mountain Pose), step your right foot back, keeping your left knee over your left ankle. Gently place your right knee on the ground. Engage your lower belly and lengthen your spine. Sink your hips as low as possible without crunching the lower back, feeling a deep stretch through your right hip flexor. Inhale to raise your arms straight up, bringing your palms together if possible and squeezing your elbows toward each other. Finally, allow your head to lower back. Gaze at your thumbs and hold for 5 breaths.



Ustrasana,  
page 43

### Standing Backbend at the Wall

#### Benefit

Stretches the shoulders and opens the chest

#### Instruction

Depending on your height, stand about 1 to 3 feet from the wall, back to the wall, feet hip-width apart. Root down into the base of the big toes and the heels while engaging your quadriceps. Internally rotate your thighs and squeeze them toward each other. Exhale to engage your lower belly and inhale to lengthen your spine. Inhale again to lift your arms alongside your ears. Squeeze your elbows toward each other and reach for the wall, aiming for shoulder height. Lower your head. Press your palms against the wall while lifting your chest. Stay for 5 breaths. To come out, bend your knees slightly and lift your torso. Draw your chin toward your chest and release your arms.

Ustrasana  
modifications,  
page 44

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## Laghuvajrasana (Little Thunderbolt Pose)

### Benefit

Stretches the quadriceps, strengthens the lower back, and builds physical and mental endurance

### Instruction

Follow the directions for the full expression of Ustrasana (see page 43). Then change the grip of your fingers and clasp your ankles, bringing your thumbs to the insides of your feet, and your fingers to the outside. Engage your lower belly to minimize compression in your lower back. Lower the head backward, then exhale to bend your knees more, slowly moving back as you walk your hands toward the backs of your knees. Try to keep your arms straight. Keep going until either the top of your head touches the floor or you begin to reach the edge of your control. Do not collapse through the lower back, chest, or neck; do not move into the full expression of this pose if you feel strain or pain in your lower back. Try to take 5 breaths, then come back up by pushing through the hands and rolling up the spine.



Kapotasana  
prep



Kapotasana,  
pages 48-49

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Find more energy and freedom in your spine—and your mind—as you move **step by step** into Kapotasana.

### Benefit

Stretches the quadriceps, hip flexors, and shoulders; strengthens the core and lower back; steadies and concentrates the mind; energizes

### Instruction

1 Start in Ustrasana. Inhale to lift your lower belly in and up and move your tailbone toward the floor to stabilize your lower back. Then reach your left arm toward the ceiling, externally rotating your left shoulder. Stay here for 5 breaths, exhale to release, then repeat on the other side before returning to Ustrasana.

2 Inhale both arms alongside your ears, bringing the palms together, if possible. Exhale, making sure your lower back is stable and long. Avoid crunching the lower back by continuing to engage the core and maintaining length in the lower spine. If you are able to proceed farther without strain or pain, inhale to extend backward, leading with the sternum. Lift your shoulders, squeezing your elbows toward each other, and let your head move back. Stay here for at least 5 deep breaths.

3 On an inhalation, reach your arms toward the floor. Press your feet into the floor and, using the same support through the legs that you cultivated in Laghuvajrasana, bend the knees only as much as necessary to reach the palms of your hands to the outside of each foot. Check in with your lower back as you work toward this version of Kapotasana, called Kapotasana B.



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# Kapotasana

kapota = pigeon · asana = pose

## Pigeon Pose



4 Walk your hands toward your knees so the fingers align with your anklebones. Transfer some of your weight to your left hand and walk your right fingers up to your right heel. After you catch your right heel, firmly grip it. Then transfer your weight slightly into your right hand and use your right heel as leverage to press up, walking your left fingers up to grip your left heel. Holding both feet, squeeze the elbows toward each other, and push your hips forward while maintaining length and space in your lower back by keeping your core engaged and your tailbone moving toward your knees. Exhale to bend your elbows and settle them toward the floor. Continue pulling forward without collapsing the hips or bringing the head to the ground. Try to stay here for 5 breaths. To exit the posture, move slowly and carefully. Inhale to return to Kapotasana B and then bring your hands back to your hips, thumbs on your sacrum. Finally, roll the spine back up so you are standing on your knees. Counter with 5 breaths in Child's Pose.

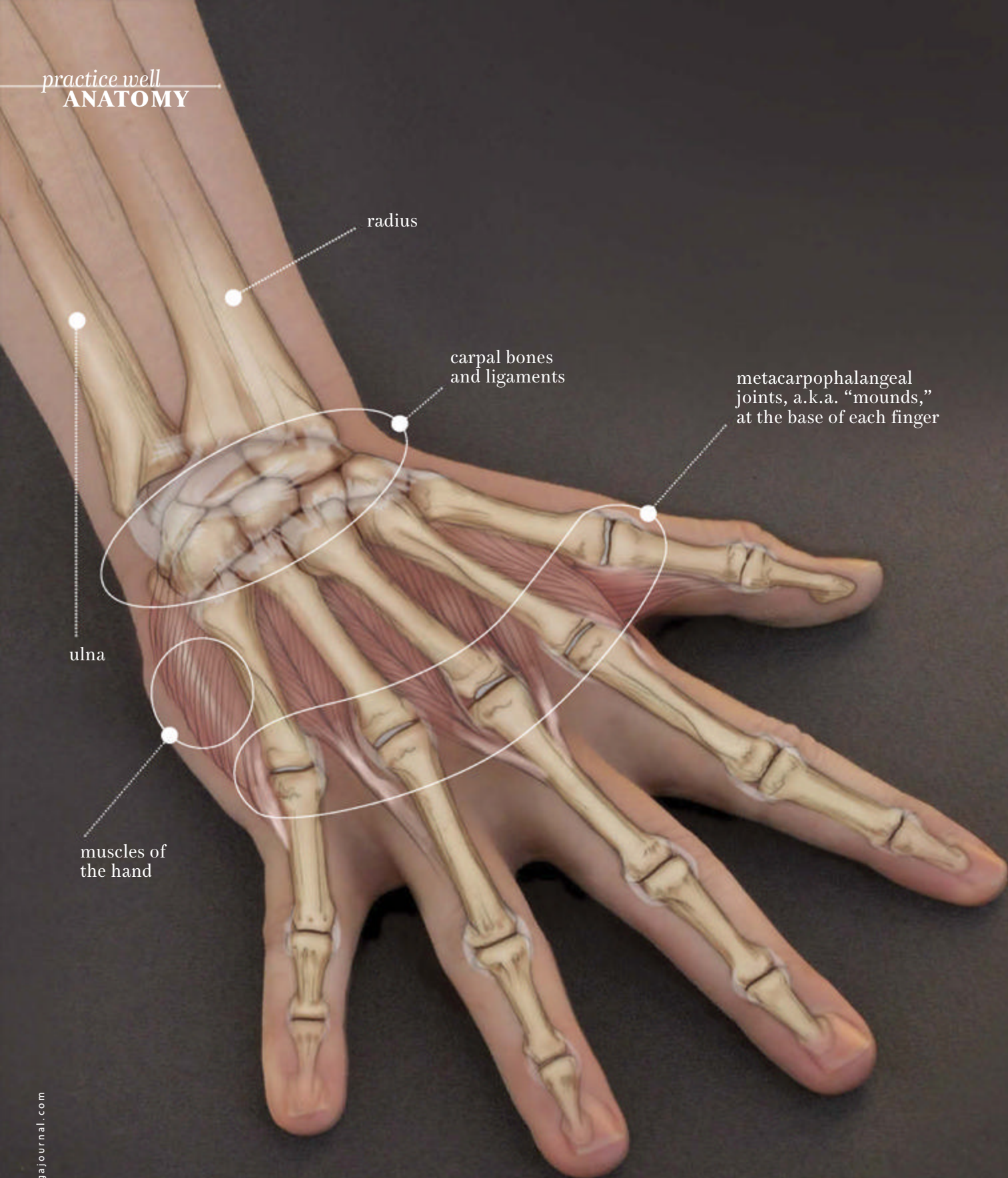
### Stay safe

If you feel pain in your lumbar spine or shoulders, back off. But if you feel stable, grounded, and like you are simply moving deeper into a stretch, you are likely experiencing a safe physical challenge, rather than unsafe pain. Face any discomfort with steady breath and poise, giving your body and mind the time they need to assess the situation. If it seems right, open and integrate the full lessons of Kapotasana.



#### LEARN MORE

For video instruction  
from Kino, visit  
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radius

carpal bones  
and ligaments

metacarpophalangeal  
joints, a.k.a. "mounds,"  
at the base of each finger

ulna

muscles of  
the hand



# { Body of knowledge

## Understanding your wrists

By Ray Long, MD

By nature, our wrists are particularly prone to injury. Learn how to protect them in your practice.

**IF YOUR YOGA** practice involves moving into and out of Downward-Facing Dog Pose and Chaturanga Dandasana, wrist pain may be a current or looming problem. I teach workshops internationally to teachers and students who are serious about improving their practices, and about 25 percent of my students admit to wrist pain during vinyasa. And when you explore the anatomy of the wrists, it's easy to see how these vulnerable structures might easily suffer from improper weight transfer and repetitive movement.

Your wrists have a lot of moving parts. They start where your two forearm bones, the radius and ulna, meet with three of the eight carpal bones on each hand. The rest of the carpal bones connect with each other and the fingers. An array of ligaments connects the many bones to each other, and muscles and tendons lie above and below the bones to move the wrist and fingers.

With all this complexity, misalignments in bones, ligaments, and muscles during weight-bearing poses are bound to happen, which can trigger wrist pain and two common conditions in particular. The first, called ulno-carpal abutment syndrome, indicates pressure where the ulna meets the carpal bones on the little-finger side of the wrist. This may occur if the ulna bone has an unusual shape—something just a small percentage of us are born with—or if the wrist is



repeatedly turned out toward the little finger in weight-bearing poses like Downward-Facing Dog.

The second syndrome, tendonitis, is characterized by tendon inflammation, often due to misalignment and weight transfer in poses such as Chaturanga Dandasana, where the wrist joint is in full extension. Chronic wrist injury is also common in yogis with relaxed or hyper-mobile ligaments, which can cause inflammation, pain, and ultimately arthritis.

The key to protecting your wrists is—surprise!—a strong core. Evidence-based medicine demonstrates that a strong core can increase the efficiency of the rotator cuff muscles. These muscles stabilize the shoulders and can thus decrease the load that is transferred to your wrists. On the flip side, low core strength or failure to engage the core in poses like Chaturanga Dandasana can lead to decreased trunk and shoulder stability. If the core is weak, strong shear forces transfer across the wrist, especially during transitions between poses. So picture the ubiquitous Down Dog-Chaturanga-Up Dog-Down Dog sequence. Each time you repeat it, your wrists bear weight throughout. Over time and without proper support, this can lead to the injuries described above. But when effort is well dispersed throughout the core and shoulders in a vinyasa-based practice, that force in the wrists is minimized.

At right is a simple four-step program to strengthen your core, rotator cuff, and wrist muscles. Step four integrates steps one through three into Down Dog. Ease into all of these poses using smooth, gradual engagement of the muscles. Prepare the body in this sequential way, maintain awareness of the core-cuff-wrist connection, and infuse these actions into every vinyasa to keep your wrists healthy and pain free. 🧘

Ray Long, MD, is an orthopedic surgeon, sports-medicine specialist, and founder of Bandha Yoga (a series of yoga anatomy books) and The Daily Bandha blog, which provides tips for teaching and practicing safe alignment.



#### LEARN MORE

For more wrist-stabilizing poses, visit [yogajournal.com/bodyofknowledge](http://yogajournal.com/bodyofknowledge)

## STAY SAFE ON YOUR MAT

### STEP ONE

#### Strengthen your core

**Forearm Plank** This exercise strengthens the abdominal core in concert with the gluteus maximus. Start lying face-down with your forearms on the floor, elbows under your shoulders. Lift your whole body so that it forms a straight line from head to heels. Attempt to drag your forearms toward your feet without movement, while contracting your gluteus maximus slightly to move your tailbone toward your heels. Continue to breathe at your resting pace and hold for 10 seconds. Exhale to lower. Repeat 2–3 times.



People with wrist pain should consult a medical professional. Avoid weight bearing in the wrists until pain subsides.

### STEP TWO

#### Activate your rotator cuffs

**Garudasana arms (Eagle Pose arms)** This stretch improves the strength and flexibility of your rotator cuffs using eccentric contractions, which gently increase tension as muscles lengthen. Sit or stand. Cross your right arm under your left and wrap your forearms around each other. Gradually raise your elbows to shoulder height and draw your left arm toward the right side to enhance the stretch. Gently press your left elbow into the right. Use less than 20 percent effort and hold for 8–10 seconds. Then bring your arms back to center. Hold for 20 seconds, before starting over on the other side. Repeat for 3 rounds.



If you have a shoulder injury or chronic shoulder condition, seek the advice of your physician before attempting Garudasana.

### STEP THREE

#### Stabilize your wrists

**Balasana (Child's Pose)** Connecting your rotator cuffs with your wrists in this pose strengthens the wrists themselves. Come into Child's Pose with your knees hip-width apart, or together; rest your sitting bones on your heels and extend your arms on the floor in front of you, palms down. Roll your shoulders out and draw your shoulder blades down your back to engage your rotator cuffs. Keep your wrists straight—don't deviate to the little-finger side. Gently press the mounds at the bases of your fingers into the mat. Note that your wrists lift slightly. This aligns your carpal bones with your radius and ulna. Maintain lift during exhalation, and relax on inhalation. You can add very gentle pressure with your fingertips and a slight gripping action with your thumbs, directed toward the little fingers to further stabilize your wrists. Hold for 5 breaths. Inhale to sit up and stretch your right wrist into extension, holding your palm up and gently pulling your fingers back toward your wrist with the other hand. Hold for 30 seconds, then stretch the left wrist for 30 seconds.

### STEP FOUR

#### Integrate steps 1-3 into Down Dog

**Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog Pose)** From Child's Pose, press the mounds at the bases of your fingers into the mat to stabilize and slightly lift your wrists. Roll your shoulders out and draw your shoulder blades down your back. Inhale to lift your hips. On an exhalation, sink your heels toward the floor and feel the muscles of your abdomen engage by drawing your belly toward your spine. Contract your quadriceps to straighten your knees. Finally, attempt to lift the tops of your feet toward your shins, draw your body back toward your heels, and further stabilize your core.



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# 10-, 20-, and 30-minute sequences for easing back pain

By Andrea Ferretti

**LOW-BACK PAIN** hits most of us at some point. It can be caused by injury, poor posture, repetitive motion, or simply aging—the soft discs between vertebrae dry over time, and less-supple discs can be more susceptible to bulging or rupture and put pressure on nerves, sending red-hot pain signals to your brain. But while getting older is inevitable, pain is not: Experts agree that routine stretching can both prevent and relieve symptoms. When your spine and pelvis are aligned and your muscles are relaxed, you can be more resilient. Use these poses to ease tension in your back, as well as in the hips, hamstrings, and inner legs, which can affect your posture and lower spine.

## Practice tip

Whether your back pain is acute or chronic, talk to your doctor before you start any new exercise routine. Then approach this sequence as a form of self-care: Go easy, soothing your nerves, mind, and body. Use deep, fluid breaths to move from pose to pose. If you feel any strain in your lower back, reduce your range of motion or skip the pose.

If you have 10 minutes, try this practice.



5 rounds,  
2 breaths each,  
1 minute total



## Ardha Apanasana Half Knees-to-Chest Pose

Lie on your back. On an exhalation, draw your right knee toward your chest and hold your right shin with both hands. In this and the following 4 poses, do not press your lower back to the floor; instead, maintain a natural lumbar curve. Slowly inhale to release the right leg back to the floor, then exhale to draw in the left knee; inhale to release. Repeat, alternating right and left, 4 more times.

5 breaths,  
30 seconds,  
each side



## Supta Padangusthasana A Reclining Hand-to-Big-Toe Pose A

Slide a hand under your lower back to make sure there is a gentle curve. Place a strap around the arch of your right foot. Exhale to straighten your right leg, stacking your ankle over your hip, or bringing your leg up as high as possible and slackening the strap as needed to feel a gentle hamstring stretch. Press through both heels, flexing your feet. Exhale to release and switch sides.

5 breaths,  
30 seconds,  
each side



## Supta Padangusthasana B Reclining Hand-to-Big-Toe Pose B

Return to your right side and take both strap ends in your right hand, extending your left arm along the floor. Exhale to lower your right leg to the right. Try to keep your left hip on the floor and your left kneecap pointing up. You should feel a stretch in your inner right thigh, but no lower-back strain. Inhale to lift your right leg back up; exhale to release it to the floor. Switch sides.

5 breaths,  
30 seconds,  
each side



## Supta Padangusthasana C Reclining Hand-to-Big-Toe Pose C

Inhale to bring your right leg back to vertical. With the strap around the arch of your foot, bring both ends into your left hand. Place your right thumb into your right hip crease and draw your hip down slightly so that you maintain length and space in the lower back. Exhale to draw your leg left across your body; inhale to bring your leg back to vertical. Release the strap and switch legs.

8–10 breaths,  
1 minute,  
each side



## Sucirandhrasana Eye-of-the-Needle Pose

Bring both knees in toward your chest, then place your right ankle on your left thigh, just above the knee. Hold your left thigh. If you want to increase the stretch, bring your left thigh forward and press your right knee away from your torso. Be mindful of the natural curve in your lower back and keep your shoulders relaxed. Exhale to release, then switch sides. After finishing on the left, roll to one side and use your hands to come to a seated position.

End here with Savasana 4 minutes

OR, HAVE 10 MORE MINUTES? TURN TO PAGE 56 TO EXTEND YOUR SEQUENCE.

If you have 20 minutes, add these poses to your sequence.



10 breaths,  
1 minute total



### Marjaryasana and Bitilasana Cat and Cow Poses

Come onto your hands and knees with your shoulders over your wrists and your hips over your knees. Inhale to gently drop your lower belly and lift your sitting bones and sternum, or chest, then exhale to round your back and gaze toward your navel. The aim is to gently stretch and increase circulation to the back muscles. Do 5 slow rounds.

8–10 breaths,  
1 minute total



### Adho Mukha Svanasana Downward-Facing Dog Pose

Tuck your toes and lift your hips up and back. If you feel any tightness along the backs of your legs, keep your knees bent. Try to make your spine as long as possible by pressing into the pads of the palms, reaching through your arms, and lengthening the sides of your body. Keep your ears in line with your upper arms and gaze at your upper thighs.

4 times,  
4 breaths each,  
90–120 seconds total



### Salabhasana Locust Pose

Lower down to your belly with your arms resting along your sides. Lengthen your tailbone toward your heels by pulling your navel back, then inhale to lift your arms, legs, and head off the floor, thumbs pointing down and toes reaching for the wall behind you. Squeeze your inner thighs toward each other, without clenching your buttocks, to engage your inner thighs. These actions help reduce compression in your lower back. Your legs don't have to touch. Stay here for 4 breaths, then lower down and repeat 3 more times.

If you have 30 minutes, add these poses to your sequence.



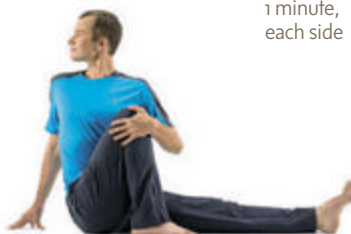
10 breaths,  
1 minute,  
each side



### Eka Pada Rajakapotasana One-Legged King Pigeon Pose

Come back to your hands and knees. Bring your right knee behind your right wrist, sliding your right foot to the left and your left leg back. Be generous with props to avoid strain: Place a folded blanket or a pillow under your right hip. Press your fingertips into the ground alongside your hips, reach your tailbone down, and breathe. Return to hands and knees and switch sides.

10 breaths,  
1 minute,  
each side



### Marichyasana III

Sit with your legs extended in front of you. Bend your right knee and place the sole of the right foot on the floor next to your inner left thigh. Inhale to gently twist to the right to release muscles along the right side of your spine. Press your right fingertips into the ground behind you to stay tall—slumping can leave the low back vulnerable. Hold your outer right leg with your left hand. Exhale to release and switch sides.

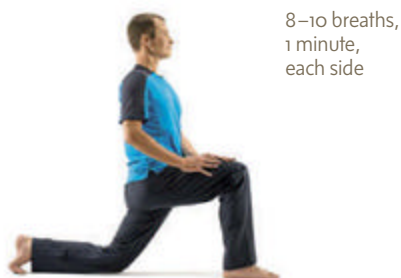
3 times,  
5 breaths each,  
90–120 seconds total



### Setu Bandha Sarvangasana Bridge Pose

Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet on the floor. With your tailbone reaching toward your heels, inhale to press into your feet and lift your pelvis and back off the floor. Interlace your fingers, pressing your shoulders into the floor as you lift your heart. Hug your inner thighs together, but keep your knees over your heels. Take 5 breaths, then lower down slowly. Repeat 2 more times.

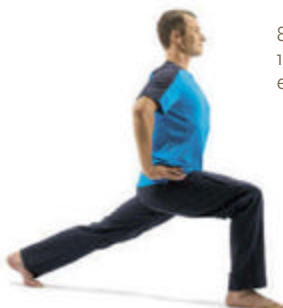




8–10 breaths,  
1 minute,  
each side

## Anjaneyasana Low Lunge

Come back to hands and knees and step your right foot forward between your hands, knee over ankle. Tuck your back toes and bring your hands to your front knee, keeping your arms relaxed. Lengthen your tailbone toward the ground and feel a stretch along the front of your left hip and leg, as well as your lower abdomen. Breathe, imagining you are creating space in the front of your left hip. On an exhalation, bring your hands down, then move through hands and knees and switch sides.



8–10 breaths,  
1 minute,  
each side

## High Lunge

Come back to a lunge on your right side, but this time straighten your left leg, which will intensify the stretch along the front of your left hip and torso. Bring your hands to your hips and try to keep your right knee over the right ankle and your right quadriceps parallel to the floor as you lengthen your tailbone and extend through your back heel. Inhale to lift your sternum and lengthen your entire spine. To come out of the pose, exhale to Low Lunge. Move through hands and knees and repeat on the left side.



8–10 breaths,  
1 minute,  
each side

## Utthita Parsvakonasana Extended Side Angle Pose

Return to High Lunge with your right foot forward. Place the left heel on the floor as you turn the pelvis to the left and reach your arms out, coming into Warrior II. Place your right forearm on your right thigh. Reach your left arm alongside your ear and gaze forward, making sure to not fold forward. Feel the stretch along your left side body and pull your navel back, feeling your tailbone lengthen toward your heels. Exhale to come back to High Lunge and switch sides.

End here with Savasana 4 minutes  
OR, HAVE 10 MORE MINUTES? EXTEND YOUR SEQUENCE WITH THE NEXT 5 POSES.



8–10 breaths,  
1 minute,  
each side

## Supine Twist

Draw both knees toward your chest and drop them to the right, trying to keep them in line with your hips. Place your right hand on your left knee to help ground your knees and look over your left shoulder. It's OK if your left shoulder comes up, as long as you don't feel strain. If you feel tension in your lower back, shift your hips more to the left or move your knees toward your feet. Come back to center on an inhalation. Switch sides.



6 minutes

## Savasana Corpse Pose

From a seated position, place a folded blanket or pillow under your knees. The idea is to elevate your knees enough so that your lower back can relax. Keep your natural lumbar curve here, too. Use your hands to support you as you lie back with your arms along your sides, palms turned up. Close your eyes and let your legs release and toes turn outward. With a deep exhalation, release any residual tension and allow your body to integrate the healthy work you just did.

**OUR PROS** Teacher **Andrea Ferretti** is a 200-hour trained vinyasa teacher, and as the former executive editor of *Yoga Journal* she has had the good fortune of working with and studying from many of the best teachers in contemporary yoga. Model **Matt Kapinus** has been teaching asana for eight years in Boulder, Colorado. You can find his vinyasa classes at almost all Colorado Yoga Pod locations: [yogapodcommunity.com](http://yogapodcommunity.com).



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Easy-to-grow edible flowers, clockwise from top: pale-blue forget-me-not, orange nasturtium, blue borage, purple pansy, pink bellis.

## flower POWER

Not all flowers are just for show. Noshing on edible blossoms may supply you with a potent dose of disease-fighting antioxidants, suggests a recent study in the *Journal of Food Science*. Researchers found that extracts of 10 common edible flowers have high levels of polyphenols, antioxidants that provide protection against disease-related inflammation. Above the rest, the tree peony, an easy-to-grow woody shrub, had the highest level of healthful components. Other top flowers included the China rose and honeysuckle. Bonus: The flowers could act as a natural preservative and help slow food oxidization. Extracts are available online at sites like [medicineflower.com](http://medicineflower.com); meanwhile, whole edible flowers contain the same antioxidants (though at lower levels) and are sold at farmers' markets, natural groceries, or high-end shops. Just be sure to do your homework, as not all flowers are safe to eat. Have fun and be creative: Enjoy edible flowers with dark chocolate or on their own as a fragrant spring salad. KATE GAMMON



# Pep talk

Thrill your palate and support your practice with healthy, sriracha-inspired hot sauce. By Yelena Moroz

**SRIRACHA IS TRENDING** among foodies and health nuts alike, and for good reason: The chili peppers that make up this spicy Thai condiment pack both tantalizing zing and capsaicin, a compound that may fight lung and gut tumors, prevent gastric ulcers, and rev metabolism.

Make your own sriracha sauce, and not only do you nix the preservatives and excess sodium found in some store brands, you can also get creative and adjust spice levels by using a mix of colorful peppers—from milder green jalapeños and red chipotles to super-spicy orange habaneros and yellow ají amarillo chilis. When it's customized to your palate, you'll want to eat it every day, says Jennifer Trainer Thompson, author of *Hot Sauce! Techniques for Making Signature Hot Sauces*. Here, Thompson shares her special sriracha recipe as well as ways to use it to turn up the heat in a variety of meals.

## sriracha-style hot sauce

MAKES 3 CUPS

- 10 dried ají amarillo chilis or chipotle peppers
- ½ lb fresh red jalapeño or Fresno peppers, chopped, seeds removed and reserved
- ½ lb orange habanero peppers, chopped, seeds removed and reserved
- 2 cups distilled white vinegar, plus more for thinning
- 1 tbsp salt
- 4 large cloves garlic
- 3 tbsp honey, plus more for sweetening
- 2 tbsp fresh lemon juice

Heat oven to 225°F. On a baking sheet, roast dried chilis until fragrant, 3 minutes. Submerge chilis in a pot of hot water and soak until soft, 20 minutes. Remove and discard chili stems and membranes.

In a medium, nonreactive (e.g., stainless steel) saucepan, combine all chilis and peppers, vinegar, and salt, and heat to below boiling; simmer, 10 minutes. Let cool.

In a blender, purée peppers mixture, garlic, honey, and lemon juice until smooth. For a thinner sauce, add 1–3 tbsp reserved vinegar. If desired, add reserved seeds to kick up the heat, or honey to sweeten. Pour into a sterilized jar and refrigerate. The sauce will remain fresh for 6 weeks.

**NUTRITIONAL INFO** 5 calories per 1 tsp serving, 0 g fat, 1 g carbs, 0 g fiber, 0 g protein, 4 mg sodium



## 4 WAYS TO SAVOR YOUR HOT SAUCE

### Marinade

Place **tofu cutlets** or **skinless chicken breasts** in a plastic bag with ½ cup **hot sauce** and shake to coat. Let sit 6 hours, then grill. You'll cook off a bit of heat but still have plenty of flavor.

### BBQ sauce

Mix **puréed tomatoes** with homemade **hot sauce**, **honey**, and chopped **fresh garlic**. Adjust ingredient amounts for desired sweetness or heat. Use to top grilled **meat**, **shrimp**, or **tofu**.

### Ice cream topping

In a bowl, combine 1 pint fresh, mashed **raspberries**, 2 tbsp **sugar**, and 1 tsp **hot sauce**. Strain and serve over **vanilla ice cream** or **lemon sherbet**.

### Vegetable dip or sandwich spread

Mix 1 tsp **hot sauce** into 1 cup **mayo**. Add to **canned tuna** or chopped **hard-boiled eggs** for a salad with extra zip, or use as a veggie dip.





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# All about herbs

Fresh herbs—one of the simplest and healthiest flavor-enhancers out there—will be abundant soon. Katherine Polenz, author of *Cooking for Special Diets*, gives her advice on storing and cooking with these versatile green gems. Plus, we've got tips for growing a few in your kitchen. By Gloria Dawson

## bay leaf

It's the sort of herb that elevates your cooking by adding depth and aroma. The flavor is difficult to describe, but you will know when it's missing.

**GOOD FOR** Enhancing stocks and soups (use one small bay leaf per gallon of liquid)

**TRY IT** In a cheesecloth, combine 1 bay leaf, 1 thyme sprig, 5 peppercorns, and 2 parsley stems, and secure with kitchen twine. Add to stock or soups; remove herb bundle before serving.



## parsley

So much more than a garnish, parsley packs plenty of vitamin K (2 sprigs supply almost 40 percent of your daily needs), vitamin C (1 cup chopped delivers your full daily amount), and antioxidants. Its mild, slightly peppery taste mixes easily into a variety of dishes.

**GOOD FOR** Blending into smoothies or sprinkling over seafood

**TRY IT** Substitute parsley for kale in your smoothie: blend 1 cup parsley, one apple, one orange, one banana, and some ice.

## basil

A member of the mint family, basil brings a fresh scent into your kitchen. If you grow your own, harvest the leaves early and often—basil can get somewhat bitter as it ages (see chart below for pruning instructions).

**GOOD FOR** Punching up sauces or salads with its pungent, licorice-like flavor

**TRY IT** Make a simple pesto. In a food processor, purée 1 cup basil leaves, ½ cup Parmesan, ¼ cup pine nuts or almonds, 3 cloves garlic, and ⅓ cup olive oil.



## Cool storage

To prevent oxidation (oxygen causes blackening) and keep herbs up to a week longer in the fridge, place them in a resealable container as soon as you get them home, slowly pour olive or grapeseed oil over them until they're glistening, and cover with a tight-fitting lid.

## homegrown HELP

Keep indoor potted herbs healthy and thriving with this easy guide.

herb	sunlight	watering	pruning
bay leaf	Low to high	Pour a little at a time. Soil should be consistently damp but not waterlogged.	Pull individual leaves as needed, but alternate branches.
parsley	Medium	Keep soil and roots moist at all times. Water thoroughly at least once a week, allowing water to run through the pot.	Snip entire stems—as much as you'd like to use.
basil	High	Keep soil just-moist at all times. Check it at least twice a week.	Cut off ⅓ to ½ of a stalk just above a set of leaves to encourage new growth. Vary height and position next time you trim.

Source: Amy Pennington, author of *Apartment Gardening*



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# *good* **CATCH**

Eating seafood can be healthy for you and the environment—if you choose mindfully.

By Paul Greenberg





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**EATING FROM THE OCEAN** is complicated. On one hand, we face health cautions associated with seafood. Toxins like methylmercury from coal-fired plants and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) from a variety of industrial processes have entered the marine food web. Methylmercury levels in some seafood and large fish like swordfish, many species of shark, and bigeye, yellowfin, and bluefin tuna all regularly exceed the Environmental Protection Agency's mercury safe limit of 0.3 parts per million by more than 20 percent. Both mercury and PCBs have been shown to cause damage to the nervous system and can impair heart health when consumed at high levels.

Along with this troubling news, we hear that the ocean has been "overfished"—meaning that we're catching more fish than can be replaced through natural reproduction. Even those who choose farmed seafood instead of wild in an effort to preserve the ocean's supply may find themselves in an environmental quandary. For example, to grow a single 10-pound farmed salmon, a farmer must feed that fish more than 15 pounds of wild fish because farmed fish aren't available as feed. Fish farming, in other words, could result in a net loss of wild fish.

But the story about fish is not entirely dire. Seafood is rich in heart-saving, brain-building omega-3 fatty acids. When compared to other meats like beef, seafood can have a lower carbon footprint. And not all seafood is in peril. As you wade through the options within the seafood category, you can choose mindfully to minimize the impact on the environment. Here are seven seafood selections that are good both for you and the planet.

## 1 ALASKAN SOCKEYE SALMON

Remember, it takes 1.5 pounds of wild salmon to grow one pound of farmed salmon. In general, then, wild Alaskan salmon is a better choice than farmed salmon if you're looking to preserve wild fish populations. But not just any wild salmon: More than one-third of those harvested in Alaskan waters start their lives in a hatchery. This practice, begun in the 1970s, was meant to artificially boost harvests. But some biologists worry that hatchery fish lack the genetic characteristics that wild fish have gained over time to adapt to their waters. Thus, pumping so many hatchery fish into rivers and streams where they're free to spawn may threaten the long-term survival of wild populations.

Your best choice: Wild Alaskan sockeye salmon, which is the least supplemented by hatcheries. As a bonus, sockeye has some of the highest levels of omega-3s and lowest levels of mercury and PCBs among salmon. Although sockeye has been overfished in the past, excellent management—ensuring that an adequate number of spawners are left in the water for the next year and enlisting fish counters statewide for monitoring—is now in place, as demonstrated by more than a decade of consistently high returns to Alaskan rivers. Biologists are forecasting the 2015 run in Bristol Bay (the nation's biggest wild sockeye fishery) to be the largest in 15 years. In all, 52 million sockeye are anticipated, up from a low of less than 20 million in 2002.

## 2 FARM-RAISED CATFISH

If every person in the world were to eat the two portions of seafood a week that most physicians recommend, the wild ocean would need to produce three times its current yield. The trick, then, is to find species of farmed fish that don't require wild fish to grow. US farm-raised catfish are fed primarily corn and soy, a diet similar to cattle feed. But because catfish (and indeed nearly all fish) are cold-blooded and don't have to spend as much energy resisting gravity as land creatures, they can much more efficiently process feed. In other words, far less feed is required to grow an American catfish than to grow an American cow. And because cattle emit methane—a major greenhouse gas—as part of their digestive process, fish end up having a much smaller carbon footprint than cows, making fish a good choice of protein.

## 3 FARMED CLAMS, MUSSELS, AND OYSTERS

Clams, mussels, and oysters don't require any fish as their feed. In fact, they grow plump and sweet by making the water a healthier place for fish to live. Here's how the system works: For years, excess nitrogen from fertilizers and wastewater-treatment plants has made its way into the marine environment. The nitrogen acts as a fertilizer and causes algae to bloom in the ocean. When bacteria eat dead algae, they consume oxygen, which can create oxygen-poor dead zones where fish can't survive.

This is where clams, mussels, and oysters come in. They eat the algae and remove it from the water before it can damage coastal ecosystems. And because the algae have high levels of heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids, the filter feeders that eat the algae can also contain very high levels of the recommended nutrients. Mussels, for example, have omega-3s at levels equivalent to canned tuna—without the mercury concerns of certain tuna types. Also, because filter feeders eat at the bottom of the food web, organic pollutants, which accumulate the higher you go up the food chain, are rarely a concern.

It's best to choose farmed clams, mussels, and oysters so as not to subtract wild filter-feeders from the aquatic system. Most farming of clams, mussels, and oysters is done in ocean waters, so it helps clean the environment while allowing the wild supply to be sustainable.

## 4 SABLEFISH OR BLACK COD

Since the passage of the 1996 Sustainable Fisheries Act, overfishing has been actively opposed and more than three dozen American fish species have been restored to sustainable levels. A major rebuilding success story has been US sablefish, also known as "black cod." Although sablefish have moderate levels of mercury (from 0.09 to 0.29 parts per million), according to the Natural Resources Defense Council, levels are generally lower than for similarly large fish. Plus, they are rich in omega-3s and are managed under strict quota systems.



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# 20 seafoods TO TRY & TO AVOID

What are the best (and worst) fish to eat for the planet's health? Here's a guide to help you decide. For more information on sustainable species and to download a seafood guide for your region, visit [seafoodwatch.org](http://seafoodwatch.org) or download Monterey Bay Aquarium's free Seafood Watch app.

## BEST CHOICES

- 1 Bass: striped (US hook & line, farmed)
- 2 Catfish (US)
- 3 Clams, mussels, and oysters
- 4 Sablefish/black cod
- 5 Salmon (wild Alaskan)
- 6 Sardines (Pacific)
- 7 Shrimp (wild Alaskan, US farmed)
- 8 Tilapia (US and Ecuador)
- 9 Trout: rainbow (US farmed)
- 10 Tuna: albacore/white canned (US and Canada, troll, pole) & skipjack/light canned (FAD free, US troll, pole) and yellowfin (US troll, pole)

## WORST CHOICES

- 1 Abalone (China and Japan only)
- 2 Crab: canned (imported)
- 3 Mahi Mahi (imported; US and Ecuador are OK)
- 4 Orange roughy
- 5 Rockfish (Canada trawl)
- 6 Salmon (farmed Atlantic)
- 7 Sharks
- 8 Squid (imported; US is OK)
- 9 Swordfish (imported; US is OK)
- 10 Tuna: albacore/white canned (except Canada & US troll, pole, and US longline), bluefin & skipjack/light canned (imported longline and purse seine), and yellowfin (except troll, pole, and US longline)



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## 5 SEA BASS

Among other fish-rebuilding success stories have been two fish, both called “sea bass:” black sea bass on the East Coast and white sea bass on the West. “Sea bass” is more of a marketing name than a taxonomic designation, and West Coast white and East Coast black sea bass are biologically very different. Like sablefish, sea bass were seriously overfished in the 1970s and 1980s, and then populations were rebuilt in the 2000s. Both of these fish are near-shore dwellers, so they are often caught by small day-boat American fishermen and marketed directly to consumers through a new kind of seafood distribution system called a community-supported fishery, or CSF. Like community-supported agriculture systems, CSFs cut out the many middlemen between producer and consumer. In a CSF system, fishermen sell shares in their catch ahead of time, allowing them to gear up at the beginning of a season.

Supporting local fishermen has clear environmental and economic benefits, as well: Currently, about 90 percent of the seafood Americans eat is imported, traveling an average of nearly 5,500 miles to reach our plates, according to a recent study published in *Fisheries Research*. But CSF-caught fish, on the other hand, journey less than 50 miles from boat to plate.

## 6 PACIFIC SPOT PRAWN OR OREGON'S PINK SHRIMP

Shrimp are the most popular seafood in America. We eat about 4 pounds of shrimp per person per year—almost as much as the combined intake of the next two top seafoods (salmon and tuna). Nearly 90 percent of the shrimp we eat is imported, which has caused problems across the globe because hundreds of thousands of acres of mangrove forest in Southeast Asia and Latin America have been leveled to make way for shrimp farms. Wild imported shrimp are problematic too, as they're

usually trawled in fine-meshed nets that can result in more pounds of accidentally killed “bycatch” than of the targeted shrimp. (Rates in shrimp fisheries have ranged from 2 to 10 pounds of bycatch for every pound of shrimp landed.) Bycatch routinely gets dumped overboard as waste. Trawling foreign shrimp and then shipping them to American markets also burns quite a bit of fossil fuel: worst case, shrimp-trawl fisheries use 4,000 liters of fuel for every metric ton landed.

The best option, then, is American and Canadian Pacific spot prawns. These 5- to 8-inch-long crustaceans are caught in traps, which minimizes bycatch. Also, they are harvested after they've spawned and just before they will die of natural causes. Spot prawns are expensive—about double the price of your standard commodity shrimp—so a cheaper alternative is Oregon's pink shrimp, which are smaller and sweeter, caught by midwater trawling with minimal bycatch, and available canned and fresh, particularly on the West Coast.

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## 7 SARDINES AND HERRING

Sardines on the West Coast and Atlantic herring on the East Coast are a much easier catch, and thus less burdensome on the environment. Because sardine and herring nets are pulled through open water with no bottom friction, these “small pelagics” require less than a tenth of the fuel to catch than bottom-trawled seafoods like flounder and sole. Sardines and herring are also rich in omega-3s and low in environmental toxins. But there is one hitch: Most American sardines and herring are used as lobster and tuna bait or salmon feed, while the sardines and herring available for human consumption generally come from other countries. But if we ask our local fishmongers to supply American-caught sardines and herring, the market will likely respond to our demands. 🐟

Paul Greenberg (@4fishgreenberg on Twitter) is the James Beard Foundation Award-winning author of *Four Fish*. His latest is *American Catch*.

# SHOP SMART

**1 RECOGNIZE FRESH.** When buying fresh catch, look for fish with clear eyes, bright-red gill rakers, and a glistening sheen on the skin. Buy a whole fish and have your monger fillet it in front of you—it will be in better shape than a fillet sitting out on ice. Save the head and bones, as they make great stock for soup and chowder. When shopping for mussels, clams, and oysters, choose ones with tightly sealed shells, a sign that they are less likely to contain pathogens.

**2 WARM UP TO FROZEN.** Ask if the “fresh” fish on the counter has been previously frozen. If it has, go to the freezer case and get the same product there. A piece of fish that has been carefully vacuum-sealed and frozen rather than sitting on ice will taste better. Also, you can use frozen fish at your convenience, defrosting as needed—allow 24 hours for it to thaw slowly in your refrigerator. Do not refreeze fish, as you can compromise the flesh and possibly introduce pathogens.

**3 PLAN AHEAD.** Fresh seafood with a high-fat content like mackerel, bluefish, sardines, and herring is best cooked the day it’s purchased, so buy these only if you plan to use them that night. Lower-fat-content “white” fish, like catfish or cod, keeps for as long as three days in the refrigerator.

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# green your practice

Honor Mother Earth this Earth Day (the 45th anniversary!) and every day during your practice with eco-friendly yoga gear and wear that look great and work hard.



## *Towel*

**Vastra Travel Towel**  
(\$25, [vastra.us](http://vastra.us))

Use it to stay dry during hot yoga class, towel off post-shower, or to wear as a stylish scarf outside the studio. The hand-loomed and quick-drying organic cotton comes in colors made from Ayurvedic herbs and plants, such as Vetiver, Indigo, and Acacia Catechu.

## *Performance top*

**New Balance Anue Kama  
Racerback Tank**  
(\$68, [newbalance.com](http://newbalance.com))

The recycled poly/Spandex fabric "felt great" against skin, said one tester, and it "dried quickly after sweaty yoga." Plus, the supportive built-in bra and angled side seams prevent chafing as you move through poses.

## *Street-style leggings*

**Satva Ayanna Legging**  
(\$59, [satvaliving.com](http://satvaliving.com))

No time for a wardrobe change after class? These comfortable skinny leggings with a rollover waistband and ankle-tie detailing are stylish do-gooders. One teacher noted the "especially soft cotton" that's certified organic and produced in rural India. The company invests a portion of its proceeds back into those communities to support local farmers.



BY SALLY WADYKA

**IT'S ONLY NATURAL** that yogis want to be mindful of their environmental impact. To help you align your inner practice with your outer style, we sought the most eco-friendly yoga gear we could find. Organic or recycled fabrics, local supply or production, and reduced packaging were just a few of the criteria. Plus, each bottom, top, mat, and prop needed to perform during practice. So we partnered with Yoga Pod in Boulder, Colorado, and asked 24 of their yogis, who teach a variety of styles, to put more than 60 selections to the test. Featured here, 21 of their favorites and the qualities that make these products shine.



### Hot yoga shorts

**Teeki Purple Hazed Sun Shorts**  
(\$46, [teeki.com](http://teeki.com))

Comfort is key during a hot yoga class, and these shorts deliver. Testers loved “the high-low waistband option” and the four-way stretch that “allows a lot of movement throughout a practice.” The fabric is 79 percent recycled polyester (21 percent body-hugging Spandex) to help manage moisture, resist chafing, and fend off bacteria.

### Eco-innovation top

**Inner Waves Organics Mohala Camisole**  
(\$119, [innerwaves.org](http://innerwaves.org))

As if making a comfortable camisole domestically from organic cotton doesn’t earn Inner Waves enough environmental street cred, the company also collects and reuses any fibers that land on the fabric-mill walls and ceiling during weaving, as well as recycles the dye water. Plus, the “soft cotton fabric was cozy during a restorative practice, and cooling during a faster heated class,” said a tester.

### Block

**Carolina Morning Designs Buckwheat Yoga Block**  
(\$119, [zafu.net](http://zafu.net))

Manufactured in the mountains of North Carolina and filled with domestically grown buckwheat, this block leaves a small carbon footprint. Yogis attested that it’s firm enough for supported Fish Pose yet has enough give to be a comfortable sitting cushion or between-thigh prop. One tester was able to “rest my forehead on it in forward folds without pain,” making it a great option for Yin Yoga and restorative yoga. The zippered cloth cover is removable and washable.

### Eco-innovation mat

**Yoloha Cork Yoga Mat**  
(\$119, [yolahayoga.com](http://yolahayoga.com))

Testers said this mat needed no air-out time to off-gas—you can start practicing right away on its sustainably harvested cork backed by rubber made from recycled tires. Naturally antimicrobial—meaning no germs and no residual body odor—the material contains a plant-based waxy substance called suberin, which only gets grippier when wet (perfect for hot yoga or SUP yoga).





#### Mat tote

**Wai Lana Green Organic Cotton Yoga Tote**  
(\$25, [wailana.com](http://wailana.com))

Made from organic cotton tinted with natural dyes and embellished with embroidered designs, this yoga-mat tote is "light and large enough to take the mat in and out of the bag easily, without being too roomy," a teacher tester said.

#### Meditation cushion

**Love My Mat Meditation Cushion**  
(\$68, [lovemyamat.com](http://lovemyamat.com))

Dubbed "sitting-pretty pillows," the cushions are made of beautiful reclaimed fabrics including floral prints, paisley, and other fun, colorful patterns. They are filled with buckwheat hulls from a local supplier, and they come with little to no packaging for reduced waste.

#### Support bra

**Moving Comfort Urban X-Over Sports Bra**  
(\$44, [movingcomfort.com](http://movingcomfort.com))

Adjustable, crisscrossing straps and contoured cups provide "great support throughout a vigorous practice," said testers. But what truly makes this bra unique: The cups are filled with "DriLayer Buzz," a trademarked material made from recycled coffee grounds that provides moisture management and odor control.

#### Men's pants

**4-rth Long Cuffed Perfection Yoga Pants**  
(\$74, [4-rth.com](http://4-rth.com))

Pronounced "for earth," this company uses Modal, a fabric crafted from beechwood chips derived from sustainably farmed birch trees, to create stylish pants that "feel great" and "move very well in poses," said yogis. And the company is doing even more for the earth by eliminating hangtags and plastic packaging.





### *Performance mat*

**Gaiam Sol Dry-Grip Yoga Mat**  
(\$70, [gaiam.com](http://gaiam.com))

Thanks to a stay-dry topcoat that wicks away moisture, “this mat had good grip, both dry and sweaty,” said one teacher. It’s also free of the most harmful phthalates—chemicals that make plastic flexible and have been linked to human health issues. The unique closed-cell rubber blocks germs, odor, and bacteria from taking up residence on the mat.



### *Eco-innovation leggings*

**Purusha People Organic Mermaid II Leggings**  
(\$98, [purushapeople.com](http://purushapeople.com))

Incredibly soft, comfy, and breathable, these organic-cotton leggings “held up well,” even in hot yoga class, said one teacher. They’re made in the United States with low-impact fiber-reactive dyes—meaning dyes bond to fibers in a way that reduces wastewater during production—and nontoxic water-based ink for the screen printing.



### *Bolster*

**Love My Mat Bolster**  
(\$88, [lovemymat.com](http://lovemymat.com))

The mother-daughter team behind this company reclaims previously owned curtains, tablecloths, and more, transforming them into unique bolsters with the “perfect amount of filling” and a “gorgeous” design, said one tester. The cotton used for the filling is sourced from a local supplier to help minimize shipping distances and Love My Mat’s carbon footprint.





### Men's top

**Anjali Men's Practice Top**  
(\$44, [anjaliclothing.com](http://anjaliclothing.com))

This fitted tank won't ride up during inverted postures, plus the flat-lock seams help prevent chafing during a hot, sweaty class. The "extremely soft" and "most comfortable" material that teachers dug comes from the eco-friendly fabric blend—rayon (derived from bamboo pulp), organic cotton, and just enough Spandex to hold the tank's shape.

### Hot yoga top

**Beckons Strength Reversible Sports Bra**  
(\$38, [beckonsyogaclothing.com](http://beckonsyogaclothing.com))

This Colorado-made, double-layered organic-cotton sports bra is naturally breathable and, yogis said, feels "very comfortable" for all types of yoga. Choose among classic white or three vivid color combinations.

### Performance pants

**Threads for Thought Half Lotus Crop**  
(\$52, [threadsforthought.com](http://threadsforthought.com))

These capris earned high marks for fit and feel thanks to the wide waistband, which offers support without binding, and a seamless design that ensures comfortable transitioning between poses. Plus, the polyester fiber is made from recycled water bottles and brushed on both sides to create a super-soft feel.





#### LEARN MORE

For more favorites,  
visit [yogajournal.com/greengear](http://yogajournal.com/greengear)

#### Blanket

**Farm2Fashion Lotus Flower & Om Throw**  
(\$140, [Farm2Fashion.net](http://Farm2Fashion.net))

Part of the Karma Mama collection of blankets, this domestically produced recycled-yarn throw is emblazoned with a lotus flower and sacred Om symbol. Less of a prop to modify postures, this cozy blanket is "great to cover students to make them feel secure, and a warmer-upper during Savasana and restorative poses," said one yoga instructor.

#### Pants for Yin

**Gaiam Organic Cotton Flow Harem pants**  
(\$88, [gaiam.com](http://gaiam.com))

These chic, slouchy, jogger-style pants strike the perfect note for a relaxed Yin Yoga or restorative practice, said testers. The Fair Trade pants are made in Peru, using Gaiam's "ecoOM technology," which blends natural fibers and comfort stretch materials that are "nice and soft," according to one teacher.


#### Street-style top

**Lolli Savasana 2 Tank Top**  
(\$50, [lollewomen.com](http://lollewomen.com))

This loose tank drapes flatteringly without clinging, making it an easy choice for Yin Yoga or unheated vinyasa, said testers. The moisture-wicking jersey (a combination of polyester and Lycra) is made partly from recycled plastic bottles.

#### Multi-use bag

**Manduka GO Free 2.0 yoga backpack**  
(\$120, [manduka.com](http://manduka.com))

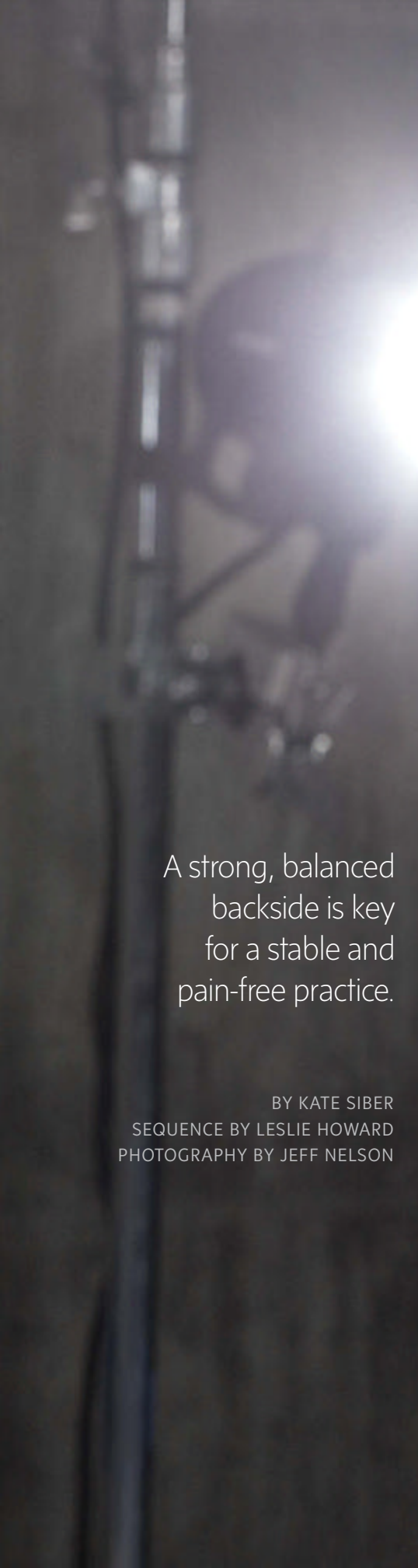
Stash everything you need for practice and beyond—your yoga mat, laptop (in the padded pocket), cell phone, clothing, and more—in this sleek, carry-it-all backpack. Materials are certified by OEKO-TEX, a European agency that ensures the environmental safety of textiles. 



A close-up photograph of a person's lower back and buttocks. They are wearing black leggings with a subtle, repeating geometric pattern of concentric squares. The person is also wearing a black waistband with a small logo on the left side. The background is a dark, textured wall.

# Your greatest *asset*





A strong, balanced  
backside is key  
for a stable and  
pain-free practice.

BY KATE SIBER  
SEQUENCE BY LESLIE HOWARD  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF NELSON

**W**HETHER YOU CALL it a fanny, derriere, heinie, or caboose, chances are you've assessed the appearance of your posterior. But what most of us haven't considered is just how useful those buns are. Together with smaller supporting muscles, the gluteus maximus, medius, and minimus make it possible to rotate your thigh inward and outward, draw your leg back, and stabilize your femur in your hip socket. The condition of your glutes can have a big impact on your posture, as well as help to prevent or alleviate back, hip, and pelvic pain.

"The buttock muscles are critical in all vertebrates for simply staying alive," says Loren Fishman, MD, medical director of Manhattan Physical Medicine in New York City, assistant clinical professor at Columbia University Medical Center, and author of five books on yoga. "They help you stand and walk, procreate (think about the forces at play), and, being some of the biggest muscles in the body, also help cushion us when we sit."

Unfortunately, parts of our modern lifestyle can cause over- and under-development in our glutes, as well as strength discrepancies between the left and right buttocks. The usual culprits are overexertion in activities like running, and sedentary jobs that lead to poor posture. Strength imbalances in our glutes can affect range of motion of our hips, sacrum—that bony plate at the base of the spine—and whether or not we experience instability and pain in forward bends and standing and balancing yoga poses.

For Leslie Howard, an Oakland-based therapeutic yoga teacher, a struggle with a painful hypertonic pelvic floor—a condition marked by extremely tight pelvic-floor muscles—led her to seek solutions through yoga. She discovered that she suffered from weak glutes on both sides, and that strengthening them and check-

ing to make sure they activated during standing and balancing postures eased her symptoms, which included pain while sitting and during intercourse.

"As yogis, we've always been taught to tuck, tuck, tuck our pelvis for certain poses," says Howard, referencing this common yoga-class instruction that leads many students to round their lower and upper backs and flatten their butts. "If you tuck too much, your gluteus muscles turn off." Instead, you want to use these muscles as they were designed to be used—engaged, but not clenched, while standing and walking, or while practicing poses like Vrksasana (Tree Pose) or Virabhadrasana I, II, and III (Warrior Poses I, II, and III). When your glutes don't fire in these situations, you are often relying on other supporting muscles, such as the hip flexors, psoas, and quadratus lumborum in the lower back, to stand, she explains. Because of the ripple effect misalignments have throughout the body, chronic tailbone tuckers often experience pain in the lower back near the sacroiliac joints, where the spine meets the pelvis.

Armed with this intel, Howard developed a workshop called Smart Ass, Dumb Ass that helps students reacquaint themselves with this often-overlooked part of the body—and not just in the mirror. A great place to start is simply standing in Tadasana (Mountain Pose), says Howard. If you normally tuck your tailbone and slouch, push your thighbones back and let the top rim of your buttocks release away from your lower back. "Don't be afraid to push your fingers into the glutes to see if they're firing," says Howard. "There's nothing better than direct experience."

Keep going with the following seven poses, which Howard uses to help students diagnose their unique glute imbalances, and strengthen the muscles that need it. You can use these poses to make your practice stronger and safer, and turn your rear into an invaluable asset.

---

Kate Siber is a freelance writer based in Durango, Colorado. She developed a new appreciation for her backside while researching this story.

# Rear-view close-up

Before you practice, a quick anatomy lesson:

On a basic level, a “smart” ass is one with toned, balanced glutes that can support good posture, Howard explains. It is defined, round, and lifted. A “dumb” ass is flat and folded under, disappearing into your legs. But of course it is more complicated than that.

The gluteus maximus is the largest of the three glute muscles. It attaches to the side of the sacrum and thighbone, or femur, and draws the femur into the hip socket. Glute max also works to kick your leg behind you and in external rotation, in addition to supporting upright,

standing postures. If the gluteus maximus is weak, muscles along the lower spine, in addition to the hamstrings, will often overcompensate, potentially causing back tension and spinal misalignment. Plus, weak gluteus maximus muscles can mean a tight pelvic floor and tight groins. You may also notice you have a tight, gripped gluteus maximus. Don’t assume your buns of steel are good: A tight muscle is often a weak muscle that may not be able to fire for too long, explains Howard. “A healthy muscle can stretch, contract, and fully relax,” she says.

The gluteus medius muscle sits partway under the maximus muscle and connects the ilium, often referred to as the hipbone, to the top of the femur. The medius helps you to externally rotate your leg when it is extended behind you, and internally rotate your hip when your leg is flexed in front of you. Together, the medius and minimus move your leg out to the side (abduction). You can find gluteus minimus under the medius; it is the smallest of the three glute muscles and also helps with internal rotation.

Alright, lesson over. Back to the mat!

## DIAGNOSTIC POSES

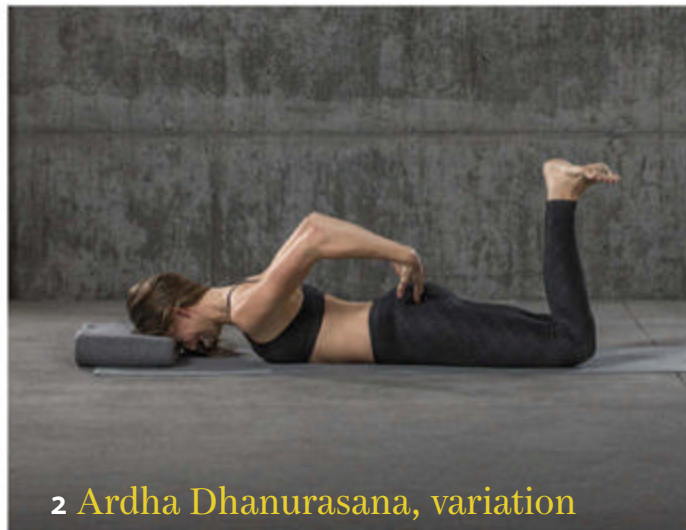
Use poses 1 and 2 to assess what your glutes are up to.

### 1 Salabhasana, variation (Locust Pose, variation)

Lie on your belly, with your forehead supported by a folded blanket and your arms by your sides, palms down. Place your right fingertips in the center of your right rear and engage your glutes—all three of them. Fire up your core a bit. Then inhale to lift the right leg, paying attention to and feeling around for which muscles are working, and how tightly. It’s possible to lift your leg with just your hamstring or quadratus lumborum muscles, so if your glutes aren’t engaging, notice what is. You want your glutes and hamstrings to firm right as you lift your leg, sharing the load. Exhale to release and switch sides. If you find that your glutes are clenching and can’t relax, take a moment to stretch them in Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog Pose).







## 2 Ardha Dhanurasana, variation

### (Half Bow Pose, variation)

To help compare imbalances from left to right, stay on your belly with your forehead resting on the blanket and inhale to bend your knees, bringing your shins to a 90-degree angle with your thighs. Keep your heels over your knees and your feet flexed. Place your fingertips at the center of your gluteus maximus, on both sides, and turn on those muscles, along with slight core engagement. Mildly rotate your legs out, pressing the feet into one another, to help you engage. On another inhale, lift your knees and shins straight up, sending your feet closer to the ceiling, as much as possible. It won't be a big lift. You are trying to simultaneously turn on both the glutes and hamstrings, so if you notice an imbalance, push the heel on the lazy-cheek side into the heel of the harder-working side to try to activate the weak glute. Stay here for as long as it takes to assess your glutes. Exhale to release.





# STRENGTHENING POSES

Get your glutes firing with poses 3-5.

## 3 Supta Padangusthasana, variation

(Reclining Hand-to-Big-Toe Pose, variation)

Lie on your back with your legs extended in front of you. Bring your arms by your sides, bending the elbows and pressing them into the floor. Engage the quadriceps and point the kneecaps toward the ceiling. Flex the feet. On an inhalation, use your left glute and your arms and obliques to lift the right leg as close to perpendicular to the floor as possible. Aim to keep both hips pressing into the floor, which can provide instant feedback—you'll be able to feel immediately if the body parts in contact with the floor are working, and you may even feel the fibers of your left gluteus maximus run from where your buttocks meet to your outer left hip. If you notice that your left glutes aren't working, ease off the arms. If that doesn't help, your right hamstrings may be taking over and you should, after your glute sequence, work on gentle hamstring stretches like Downward Dog and Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend). Repeat the leg lift 8-10 times on the right before lowering the leg on an exhalation and starting over on the other side. Feel free to do more repetitions on your weaker side, making sure to fire your glutes before lifting your leg.





## 4 Setu Bandha Sarvangasana

(Bridge Pose)

Release the arms down and bend the knees, bringing the feet in so they are below the knees, and graze the heels with your fingertips. Inhale to lift your hips and move the chest toward the chin. Roll onto your shoulders by moving the shoulder blades closer together and clasping the hands. From here, lift the balls of your feet and stomp your heels down to activate the gluteus maximus and take this pose out of your back. Hold for 30–60 seconds; exhale to release the hands. Slowly lower down, actively pressing the heels into the floor. Relax completely.



## 5 Anjaneyasana

(Low Lunge)

Come to standing and step your left foot back, gently lowering your left knee to the floor and placing a hand on either side of your right foot, using blocks under your hands if you are rounding through the spine. Make sure your right knee is over your right ankle. Keep your left toes tucked so you can push through the heel. Slightly contract your left gluteus maximus to push the left femur back and stretch the left groin. Without this engagement, your femur can push forward into the groin area and over time cause injury, including labral tears in the ring of cartilage around your hip socket. Stay in Low Lunge for 1–2 minutes before exhaling to release. Step the left foot forward and return to standing. Repeat on the other side, then rest in a modified Balasana (Child's Pose), with your knees and feet apart.







## PRACTICE POSES

Apply what you've learned to these final, standing poses.

### 6 Virabhadrasana II

(Warrior Pose II)

As you learned in Low Lunge, engaging the gluteus maximus will help move your femurs back and stretch the groins. Keeping the femur back also helps you to ground down through your heels, so you feel more rooted and stable in standing poses—a key to a balanced, effective, and safe yoga practice.

**6a** From standing, step your left foot back 3–4 feet, the toes turned in about 30 degrees. Bring your hands to your hips, guiding them to face the wall in front of you. Root into your feet, externally rotate both femurs, and start to bend the right knee, tracking it toward the little-toe side of your foot. Pause here and notice what is going on with your glutes, tailbone, and legs. Are you tucking? Are your glutes turned on? How much weight is in each foot?

**6b** Beginners usually practice with too much weight in the front foot in Warrior II—but with the gluteus medius and minimus engaged, the back femur can externally rotate, allowing you to ground more through your back foot, especially the heel. With your hands still on your hips to keep them square, and your feet grounded, slowly start to bend the left knee. This will allow you to externally rotate the left femur even more, which will let you push your femur back and use the gluteus medius and minimus to help you ground more through your left heel and foot. Slowly start to straighten the left leg again, keeping the external rotation you just gained from bending the knee. You should now feel more weight in the back foot, and your breath should be freer in the left side of your body from decompression in the spine.

**6c** Maintaining that grounding sensation and engagement in the left glutes, keep your hips level as you exhale and bend deeper into the right knee, bringing it over the ankle. Extend the arms out, palms down, letting the shoulders release down. Bring the gaze past the right fingertips. Take 10 deep breaths here. Exhale to lower the arms; inhale back to standing, pushing more into the back foot to come up. Switch sides.







## 7 Utthita Parsvakonasana

(Extended Side Angle Pose)

You can continue to play with activating the glutes in all of your standing poses. Practicing Extended Side Angle Pose adds a challenge, since you have to keep the legs grounded while sidebending. Start as you did for Warrior II, taking all of the same steps to get into the final pose. Root down through both heels, especially the back, to help tap into that grounding energy, also called *apana vayu*. From Warrior II, exhale to bring the right hand to the floor or a block and the left arm alongside the left ear, maintaining level hips and length in the spine. Take 10 breaths before switching sides. »



OUR PROS Teacher **Leslie Howard**, based in Oakland, California, specializes in all things pelvic. She leads trainings nationally, and her teaching is informed by more than 3,000 hours of study with senior Iyengar teachers. Learn more at [lesliehoward yoga.com](http://lesliehoward yoga.com). Model **Amy Dalton** teaches yoga and fitness in Boulder, Colorado, and is a stickler for alignment. You can find her at [amydaltonyogaandfitness.com](http://amydaltonyogaandfitness.com).





BHAKTI  
BOOGIE YOGA



# YOGA REBELS

BY MELINDA DODD

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ZÉ OTAVIO

These five teachers may just change the way you think about yoga.

**FOR A LONG TIME**, just being involved in yoga made you a rebel. In ancient India, the Śramaṇa monks who developed the discipline were ascetics who gave up their possessions and left their homes to live in caves and forests. In 1934, when B.K.S. Iyengar started studying yoga, “ridicule, rejection, and outright condemnation” were one’s expected lot, he famously wrote. In recent years, US teachers from Jivamukti co-founder Sharon Gannon to Tara Stiles, founder of Strala Yoga, have stirred up their own controversies by introducing unconventional approaches.

Today, yoga is in the mainstream, with a couple of widely accepted lineages of teaching passed down from the masters and 21 million Americans engaging in the practice. Yet some teachers still strike out in their own direction, challenging familiar rhetoric and provoking discussion about what yoga really is. “At every stage, yoga has had its mavericks,” says Jocelyn Gordon, founder of Bhakti Boogie Yoga. She and the four other teachers featured here are among them now, shaking things up with fresh ideas that break from the norm.

## JOCELYN GORDON

Bhakti Boogie Yoga

Sometimes the most transformative yoga springs from deeply personal places. For Jocelyn Gordon, 41, the

practice she now calls Bhakti Boogie Yoga (BBY) was influenced by the many happy days she spent hanging out in her room alone as a teen, during which she read, prayed, wrote poetry, and danced for hours. “It was an intimate, lovely time, very emotional and evocative,” Gordon remembers. “I felt a real connection to God.”

Flash forward to 2008. By then, Gordon was in teacher training at Pure Prana Yoga Studio in Alexandria, Virginia. She had spent years studying jazz, ballet, samba, and Afro-Haitian dance. In order to finish this latest yoga course, Gordon had to create her own teaching style. And then: “Sitting in meditation, the name ‘Bhakti Boogie’ came to me,” Gordon recalls. “*Bhakti* means to offer up, to connect with something larger than yourself. But ‘boogie’ means to get down. I found joy in the polarity.”

She’s been teaching BBY ever since. Her two-hour classes draw on aspects of slow-flow hatha, Kundalini, and vinyasa yoga, and add animalistic movements and partner interactions that accentuate the intensity or fervor until it all transforms into a kind of ecstatic dance.

“Our asana practice starts in a very disciplined, focused way, with an emphasis on traditional postures that unlock the body so our inner potential becomes present, and we are aware,” Gordon says. “Once that happens, the body has a natural way of moving. For me, once I let that energy rise up inside—that life force, that

shakti—I didn't want to stay in a static pose anymore. I wanted to move my wrists, to rotate my neck, to express it in my voice, my shoulders, my hips."

Visitors to a BBY class may be surprised by how freeing it is. "It's irreverent, fun, and playful," Gordon emphasizes. "But it's also vulnerable, authentic, intimate. This practice space—this dance floor—allows us to explore different ways of being. I'm not into 'Down Dog! Up Dog! Chaturanga!' I want a self-directed, kinesthetic experience."

Her moves invigorate. Students go into a goddess squat, raise and drop their arms to a tempo, and pump their pelvis in and out while shifting into African dance. They start in Tadasana (Mountain Pose), and mimic pulling stars out of the sky, stepping quickly to an accelerating beat. Making noise is encouraged. "Sometimes in Down Dog, you just want to go 'Uhhhhh,'" says Gordon.

While some classes spotlight 1990s music or "activating the booty," others are about losing yourself in the rhythm and the joy of letting go. The key? Finding the asana in every moment. Gordon says: "It's really about connecting to the earth, here and now. From the inspi-

"Meditating to calm down is like putting a lid on a boiling pot."

—WANG BO

ration of the breath comes the movement, the aliveness."

Bhakti Boogie shares much of its spirit with Gordon's HoopYogini, a popular course she designed in 2011 and still teaches. "All of my offerings emphasize presence and strength, relaxation and creativity," she says. HoopYogini merges hatha yoga and hula-hoop dance in a dynamic, strength-building series of moves; at present, there are 40 certified instructors, and an online training course offers live sessions, plus 25 videos ([hoopyogini.com](http://hoopyogini.com)).

But it's Bhakti Boogie Yoga that will lead Gordon into the future. She is gearing up to host her next US workshops in New Orleans (July 2–5) and Big Sur, California (August 14–16), and at Burning Man (August 30–September 7 in Nevada's Black Rock Desert), with upcoming retreats in Bali and Malaysia. For info, visit [jocelyngordon.com](http://jocelyngordon.com).

## WANG BO

HungryMonk Yoga

Shaolin monk Wang Bo may be the living definition of poetry in motion. The creator of HungryMonk Yoga, a mix of tai chi, yoga, and kung fu, Wang is a captivating performer—spinning, kicking, dodging, and weaving with great delicacy and control. He glides smoothly and exactly between moves, showing his respect for the disciplines he learned as a child. It's that reverence for form that makes him so special.

Wang, now 25, received his training in yoga and martial arts at the Shaolin Temple in Hunan, China, where he lived for 11 years before a brief career as an award-winning kung fu stage artist and competitor. In 2011, he opened a yoga studio in Torrance, California, and debuted HungryMonk Yoga—so named to remind students of the need to stay spiritually hungry and recharge themselves with its arts.

HungryMonk's three disciplines fit together naturally.

"There are seven basic stances at the core of all martial arts and yoga," clarifies Wang. "For example, what we call Tree Pose in yoga is similar to Ceti Xi in kung fu; Chair Pose is Dungbu; Warrior is Gongbu. If you slow down the moves of kung fu, they can be yoga moves. And kung fu is really a spiritual practice, a form of meditation." Tai chi, meanwhile, adds balance: "It brings in a softer part of ourselves," he explains.

HungryMonk Yoga is steeped in the five-element theory of Chinese philosophy, which says that metal, wood, fire, water, and earth create the world—both in their physical manifestations and as aspects of human nature. Each class is named after an element and emphasizes its main trait: strength (metal), rootedness (wood), power (fire), fluidity (water), and solidity (earth).

Classes cover the seven stances and offer

100 forms (or mini-movement sequences) per element.

Of course, yoga doesn't usually come with weapons. In HungryMonk Metal sessions, students may do wide-legged squats while holding a sword, and then swing it while gliding through Warrior I and into Chair Pose. In Wood classes, students bear and rotate wooden poles while stretching their arms and legs. In Fire lessons, they forgo arms and instead make brusque movements, intensely punching the air. "In kung fu and tai chi, there are rotations and beautiful turns, so we add those at the end of each yoga pose," Wang says. Each element's softness or hardness dictates whether the class will incorporate yoga, tai chi, or kung fu in greater or lesser proportions.

Classes can be surprisingly cathartic. "We try to purify negativity and turn it into something positive," Wang says.



HUNGRYMONK  
YOGA



## KAIUT YOGA



“When you get angry, or you have a hard time, meditating to calm down is hard—like trying to put a lid on a boiling pot. Kung fu brings it out instead, using fire moves.” Long ago, Wang learned that this kind of focus could be healing. “In the temple, we think of movement as a mantra,” he explains. “When you act, you don’t think. It slows you down and transforms the mind.”

The Shaolin monks Wang knows are happy he is spreading kung fu in a peaceful way. His students love the complexity and diversity of the practice, not to mention the creative names of its moves (Two Arms Break the Mountain; Foot Kicks the Fierce Tiger). “Students are tired after class, but you still see smiles on their faces,” Wang says. For info, visit [hungrymonkeyyoga.com](http://hungrymonkeyyoga.com).

## FRANCISCO KAIUT

Kaiut Yoga

From the moment you step into a Kaiut Yoga class, it’s clear something different is happening. No one is cycling through

a sequence of poses; in fact, there may be just one pose covered in a 90-minute session. The students around you aren’t trying to mimic their teacher’s alignment; instead, each one is learning how to adjust her body in a different way, based on her own physiology. In most cases, everyone is lying down or leaning against props, focused intently on a personal goal. Often, their eyes are closed when they move. The only journey that matters is their own.

“Too many yoga teachers only care about achieving a ‘perfect’ pose, and that just doesn’t exist,” says Francisco Kaiut, 44, a former chiropractor who operates Kaiut Yoga School in Curitiba, Brazil. “Each body is a living organism, influenced by certain forces; it does not always respond to the same logical, mathematical progression. What’s perfect for you is not perfect for me.”

In his chiropractic work, Kaiut regularly saw how medical conditions, injuries, accidents, stress, and even emotional and social trauma imprinted on the joints, leading to instabilities that spawned inflammation and strain elsewhere.

As a yoga teacher today, his primary objective is to help students restore a full range of mobility and circulation to poorly functioning areas of their bodies. He uses yoga poses like levers to isolate damaged areas, and applies smaller, more precise moves to add or reduce pressure as needed, opening up tight spaces, reviving function, and releasing pain.

In pursuit of this healing breakthrough, Kaiut frequently goes against standards of alignment and turns familiar poses upside-down. For example, Utthita Trikonasana (Extended Triangle Pose) is typically taught from a standing position, with a hand stretching down toward one’s foot. But Kaiut has his students start at the foot and reach up to solidify their connection to the ground. “By changing the move, we can use gravity to stabilize your ankle, which creates a sense of safety for the brain, nervous system, and spine,” he explains.

Sukhasana (Easy Pose) gets an alignment makeover from Kaiut. It’s usually done in a straightforward cross-legged sitting position, but he feels that this method may actually reinforce existing spinal problems. He prefers to have students round their backs, place their head and palms on the ground, and rotate their hips and thighs out and forward. “It resets and balances the impact of sitting all day, and removes rigidity in the spine and hamstrings,” he says. For many yogis new to his class, there is a real learning curve. “Often, students who have done yoga before



want to extend the spine, and they look at you and say, 'I have to extend it, because I have this thing going on in my back,'" Kaiut says. "I just say, 'OK, this is not what we are doing.'"

Because Kaiut teaches up to 60 students per class, he works with 1,500 unique lesson plans, all tackling a wide range of concerns. Classes are tightly supervised and students carefully assessed. "I am always doing research when I teach," Kaiut says. "I read my students' eyes, their expressions, their micro-movements. I tell them to let me know what they experience."

In the United States, a few dozen people are trained in Kaiut Yoga, which Kaiut teaches biannually in Boulder, Denver, and Hotchkiss, Colorado (the next session begins in July). In Brazil, where Kaiut Yoga School is the country's largest (20 new locations will open this year), there are hundreds of facilitators, and 3,500 people attend classes weekly. For info, visit [kaiutyoga.com](http://kaiutyoga.com).

## MARK DIVINE

### Warrior Yoga

Being a badass just seems to come naturally to Mark Divine. The 51-year-old retired Navy SEAL commander (nickname: Cyborg) is a 6'1", 195-pound wall of muscle, a two-time karate black belt who's completed multiple tours of duty in the Middle East and been certified to teach military hand-to-hand combat. But he's also a devoted yogi, a serious student who has undergone extensive training in Ashtanga and Viniyoga. A decade ago, he created Warrior Yoga while on a SEAL team mission to Baghdad.

"I brought my yoga mat to the war zone," says Divine. It was an enervating three-month tour, and he craved the relief of exercise, but the nearest gym was a risky three-hour drive. To stay fit, he turbocharged his daily yoga practice, adding interval training, fighting sequences, and meditative breathing exercises. At the end of each session, he'd visualize being home. "It really helped me," Divine recalls. "It warded off combat-related stress, and allowed me to stay in shape. I felt real clarity and peace of mind."

Over the next few years, the Navy SEAL continued to develop his new discipline, which he started calling "Warrior Yoga." In 2007, he opened a 20,000-square-foot training facility in Encinitas, California, and later launched two programs geared toward mental and physical fitness, called SEALFIT and Unbeatable

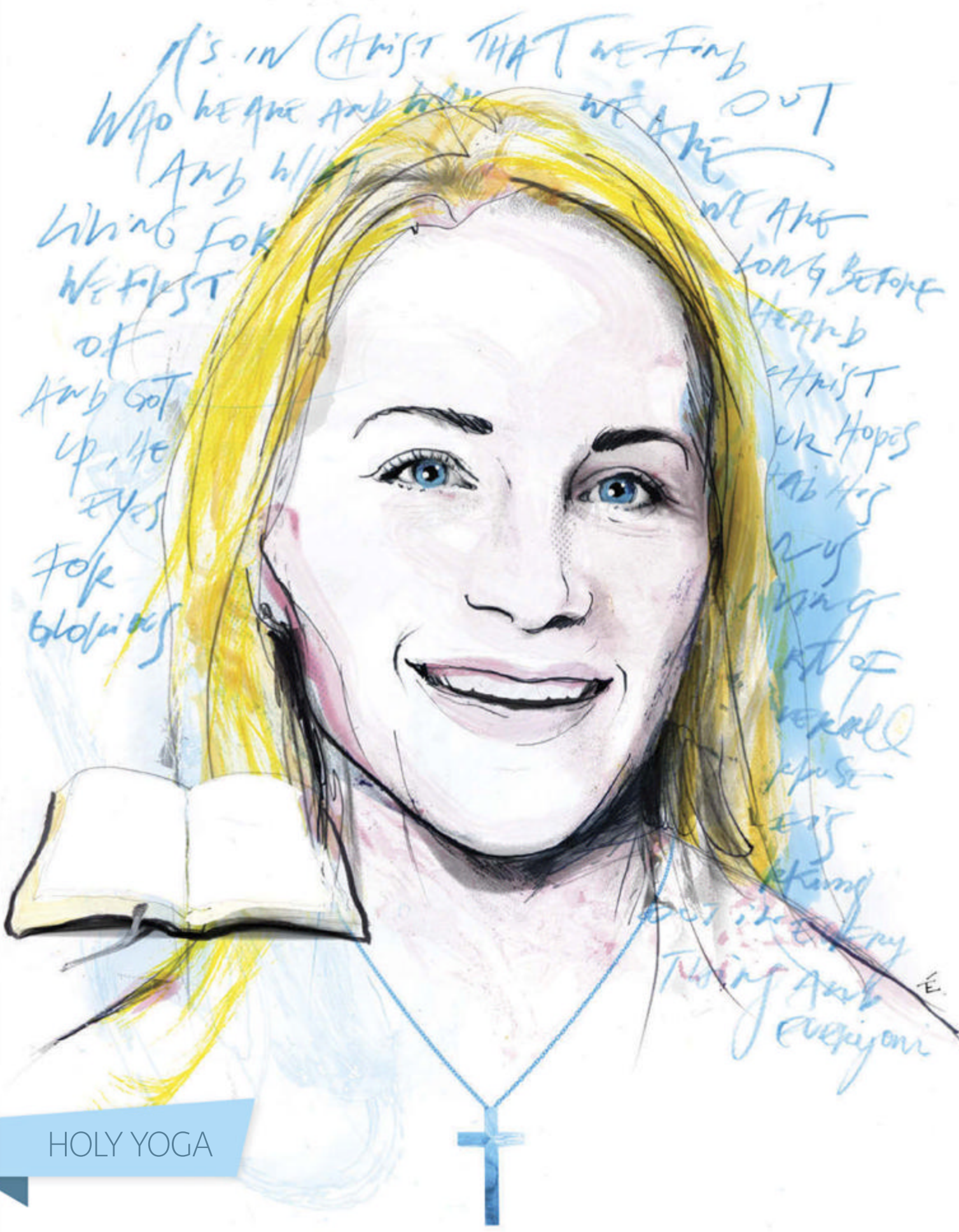
Mind, through which Warrior Yoga was originally taught (individual classes are now available at the facility).

In its updated incarnation, Warrior Yoga is an integrated class series that's designed to "rewire" your system, not unlike SEAL training itself. It combines functional fitness, martial arts, and yoga, and emphasizes breathwork, goals visualization, meditation, and positive thinking. Sessions can be moderate (aimed at boosting energy and mental or physical recovery) or intense (for pure fitness or fighting).

Divine's classes draw an eclectic group of students, from athletes and executives to soldiers and Special Ops trainees, more than 1,000 of whom have opted to try its tough, SEAL-like regimens. "These are people who've probably never stepped foot in a yoga studio," Divine points out. "They're not interested in mythology, Sanskrit, or Namaste. They get it from a performance







It's in Christ THAT we Find  
Who we are And how we are  
And how we are  
When for  
We first  
of  
And got  
up, the  
eyes  
for  
blooming  
we are  
long before  
Christ  
our hopes  
taking  
us  
ring  
out of  
recall  
those  
eyes  
looking  
out in every  
thing And  
everyone

HOLY YOGA



standpoint, or understand that they'll be more effective in combat."

Students are taught not to go easy on themselves—and to never, ever quit. "I'm trying to develop the next generation of warriors, inside and outside the military," Divine explains. "Warrior Yoga shows people how to transmute emotion into determination. It develops intuition, awareness, mental control, resilience, and spirituality. At the same time, it promotes spinal health, joint mobility, and core strength."

In its most extreme sessions, Warrior Yoga requires students to keep moving relentlessly, swinging kettle bells, doing roundhouse jabs, and zipping quickly through a vinyasa flow. Other classes reference the nonstop SEAL workout known as Grinder PT: "Imagine doing six Sun Salutations, flowing into jumping jacks, push-ups, air squats, flutter kicks, and sit-ups, then going back to standing poses, followed by more calisthenics and yoga," Divine says.

Warrior Yoga's modernized asanas intrinsically reflect the spirit of battle, honor, and exaltation. In "Fighting Warrior," students use punches to make the transition from Warrior I to Warrior II, developing their tensile strength and musculature. The "Humble Warrior" is a submissive Warrior I, hands clasped behind the back, head down.

Humble Warrior may best represent the teacher's ethos. "The true warrior abhors war," Divine says. "He is the last to pick up his lance. And that's what I experienced in the field: Advanced warriors were the ones who tried hardest to avoid conflict." For info, visit [unbeatablemind.com](http://unbeatablemind.com) or [SEALFIT.com](http://SEALFIT.com).

## BROOKE BOON

### Holy Yoga

Before Brooke Boon could create the practice that would ultimately change her life, she had to give up yoga altogether. It was 2003, and the then 26-year-old mother of three was living in Phoenix and running her own studio (she's trained to teach Anusara, Ashtanga, Baptiste, and Yin Yoga). She'd also recently become a Christian, and word was, yoga was a religious conflict. Reluctantly, she bade it goodbye.

"It killed me," Boon recalls. "But I had been told by a number of fellow Christians, and read online, that Jesus and yoga don't mix. There was concern about yoga being a pagan practice, one that was inextricable from Hinduism. So I decided to stop doing it. And then... I was miserable."

The hiatus lasted two years. In 2005, unable to resist any longer, Boon returned to her yoga mat. "I was created for yoga," she says she realized. As her joy in the practice returned, so did a feeling of purpose. "On my mat, alone with God, Holy Yoga was born," she says.

Holy Yoga takes the format of a vinyasa class, and infuses it with a distinctly Christian point of view. As soft music plays

"Why can we talk about Krishna and not talk about the Bible? It's all divine."

—BROOKE BOON


in the background, teachers read from the Scriptures or discuss their spiritual "intent" for the day, then talk about how these messages manifest themselves in every subsequent breath and asana. Students in Camel Pose may be asked to open their hearts to the Lord; those resting in Child's Pose concentrate on His protection. Instead of Namaste, the 60- to 75-minute sessions end in prayer and an "amen."

Boon teaches Holy Yoga classes at her church biweekly, but the impact of her brand has a much wider reach: It's spawned an eponymous nonprofit organization (funding mission trips and scholarships), a book (*Holy Yoga: Exercise for the Christian Body and Soul*), and an online channel (Holy Yoga TV).

While there are other Christian yoga classes, Holy Yoga's fame (and name) frequently draws the ire of Evangelical Christians, who not only feel it's at odds with their religion but say it relies overly on self-enlightenment, instead of God. Most famously, Seattle pastor Mark Driscoll (who resigned from his church last October) compared yoga to committing adultery; other folks barrage Boon with hate mail and ask her to repent.

The yoga community, she says, is more understanding. "They just don't get why it has to be Jesus, why it can't be neutral," Boon says. "But that is the truth of my beliefs. Why can we talk about Krishna, or the Bhagavad Gita, and not talk about the Bible? It's all divine, whatever you call it."

None of this has affected demand for Boon's teacher training, which comes in 95-, 225-, and 500-hour versions and has seen registration double since 2012 (there are currently 1,002 instructors worldwide). Students study yoga history and physiology as well as the Bible (led by an in-house pastor). Special curriculums highlight religious holidays.

A decade has passed since Boon first started the practice. Now she has a new mission: "We want to minister to others." For the next few years, instructors and pastors will travel the world, sharing Holy Yoga with survivors of human and sex trafficking. "We're going to bring them the good news of the Gospel through yoga," she says. For info, visit [holyyoga.net](http://holyyoga.net). 

Melinda Dodd is a freelance writer and editor based in New York City.



"When I look at this photo, I think about my life coming full circle. I grew up just up the road from this area that's now part of my yard. It's a great place to meditate."

**Kristin Polenz**  
Eau Claire, Wisconsin

## in focus

Readers share the yoga they practice in gardens.



"My eight-year-old son, Aidan, and I chose to do Crow Pose at Chicago Botanic Garden. It's the first arm balance that I taught him."

**Melissa Gall**  
Chicago, Illinois

"When I'm in my garden, I often take breaks to practice and center in order to connect more with myself and the plants."

**Jordan Mallah**  
Stanfordville, New York



"I was so overcome by the beauty of the tulips that I was inspired to do a big, heart-offering backbend."

**Ann Dalessandro**  
West Newbury, Massachusetts



"A visit to San Francisco's Japanese Tea Garden filled me with joy. Lord of the Dance Pose was a great way to express my contentment."

**Kristina Zujkovic**  
Montreal, Canada

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## CONSIDER THIS

# Do yogis have better sex?

By Jessie Lucier

**We collected insights and evidence from academics, yogis, and other experts in the fields of conscious living, social criticism, and neurology to bring you the answer.**

Yoga may be able to improve sexual performance in both men and women. Studies our research group has published in *The Journal of Sexual Medicine* suggest that **practicing yoga for an hour a day increases pelvic and abdominal muscle tone, which can improve stamina and performance.** We've also found that yoga calms the mind and stabilizes the autonomic nervous system, which can decrease anxiety, allowing for a more satisfying, relaxed time in bed.

**Vikas Dhikav, PhD**

Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education & Research, Indraprastha University, New Delhi, India

**When you are walking the spiritual path and get to the bliss of divinity, it's a thousand times more enjoyable than sex.** It's that present moment of complete freedom that people are looking for in life. We find it momentarily in sex, but sex leaves you exhausted, whereas when you are in union with the divine, you have unlimited, sustainable energy and bliss. So rather than just the union of two bodies, it's union with the divine, which is what yoga is—uniting mind, body, and spirit.

**Patti Montella**

Senior Faculty, Art of Living Foundation

Based on my research, the anecdotal evidence is that women who are happiest with their sex lives tend to do some sort of mind-body practice like yoga. Women who practice yoga may have more sensation because yoga supports spine health, which in turn supports circulation and engorgement.

**Yoga integrates the spirit and the body, and that is very therapeutic—especially for women who've experienced sexual abuse. I think yoga supports better sex in a holistic way—certainly in women, and I would be surprised if that weren't true for men as well.**

**Naomi Wolf, PhD**

Author of *Vagina: A New Biography*

#### Something on your mind?

Send us your questions to start the discussion at [letters@yogajournal.com](mailto:letters@yogajournal.com).

Yogis can be better lovers because of their breath control, flexibility, and ability to be present. Tantra Yoga is a path to increase sexual energy, which is not just the energy of passion, but also the energy of creativity and of the animating life force that keeps us young and vital. Just through breathing at the right time, **all yogis can take an ordinary orgasm, add pranayama, and quadruple its length, power, and ability to awaken the brain and upper chakras.** So, yogis can make better lovers, and Tantra yogis can become masters of the art of love.

**Charles Muir**

Founder of the Source School of Tantra Yoga, pioneer of conscious sexuality, and yoga teacher

**Not necessarily. While flexibility and body consciousness might be great erotic attributes, the average yoga practitioner has received no better sex education than anyone else.** He or she might be just as bound up with shame and gendered ideas about what is "normal" or acceptable, or fear exploration and experience. Furthermore, in some yogic traditions, sexual abstinence is encouraged—though that's not the norm among most practitioners. And not all yogis are Tantric-sex enthusiasts.

**Carol Queen, PhD**

Sexologist, sociologist, and author



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# Sangeeta Vallabhan

This humble teacher is helping thousands find their way in New York—and in life.



## LEARN MORE

Take Sangeeta's classes on feeling grounded and partner work with YogaVibes. [yogajournal.com/sangeeta](http://yogajournal.com/sangeeta)

A teacher at Yoga Works and Kula Yoga Project, Sangeeta Vallabhan travels the NYC boroughs on what she calls a Solemarch, a quest to help students be the sole proprietors of their own yogic paths. Steeped in formal dance education and more than 1,000 hours of yoga training, her teaching is inspired by the ancient yogic texts, and blends movement with intention. It's an approach that has served her students for more than 10 years. And now she's bringing her technique to free yoga classes in Bryant Park and to people suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

## How did you find yoga?

After studying ballet at the University of Texas at Austin, I moved to NYC to dance, and a teacher introduced me to yoga. Over time, I trained with Jivamukti, Golden Bridge, and Kula Yoga Project, and started my own classes in 2003 at gyms in Queens. I went on to get an 800-hour Jivamukti certification and prenatal yoga training. Asana translated easily for me; the more I studied yogic philosophy, the more meaningful yoga became. It is my calling.

## What is your teaching philosophy?

I want students to feel empowered and strong, not having to always look outside themselves for inspiration. When students practice with intention, they feel more grounded, bringing a sense of ease and connection to themselves and to the people around them. This is how yoga helped me 13 years ago, when my mother passed: I learned how to comfort myself, but also how to reach out for support.

## What inspires you?

When I see how much suffering there is in the world because we are divided by the color of our skin, gender, sexual preference, religion, income, etc., I'm inspired to help others see sameness more than they see difference, and treat everyone with love, compassion, and kindness. I'm also training with Warriors at Ease to introduce yoga to veterans enduring PTSD and other trauma. Bringing yoga to a community that may be otherwise unexposed keeps me inspired. I think yoga, in conjunction with therapy, inspirational texts, and other approaches, can facilitate healing for all of us. **JESSIE LUCIER**

TARIQ ZEHAWI

## in the DETAILS

Vallabhan shares a few more of her favorite things.

### Pose

Savasana is where it all comes together. Rest is necessary for the body to settle.

### Food

Anything my dad makes. It's South Indian food made with love.

### Escape

The beach, nourished by swimming in the ocean. My favorite destinations are Tulum and La Culebra, Mexico.

### TV show

*The Colbert Report*. I love how everything was taken to the edge, but kept light and funny.

### Music

Kirtan. I love chanting, at the beginning or end of a practice. It grounds me like nothing else.



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Brandy Harrison, certified yoga teacher and president and co-founder of Yoga Gardens, guides students in Supported Headstand.



# Urban oasis

Yoga Gardens transforms a Chicago food desert into a mecca for organic produce and asana. By Letitia L. Star

**THE SUN BEAMS** on yoga students as they flow through Sun Salutations while surrounded by flowers, trees, and an organic produce garden that will soon yield a cornucopia of lettuces, herbs, peppers, tomatoes, root vegetables, and more. You wouldn't know it, but just three years ago, this lush landscape in Chicago's low-income Garfield Park neighborhood was a pile of rubble.

The metamorphosis of this abandoned inner-city plot into a thriving yoga and garden center is the result of work by Yoga Gardens, a nonprofit organization formed by Morr Solomon, Brandy Harrison, and Frediliza David in 2012 to bring yoga and healthy, locally grown food to underserved areas in Chicago. Today, the Garfield Park location features an expansive deck for yoga classes bordered by more than 23 different organic herbs and vegetables, including 12 varieties of tomatoes, as well

as dozens of native perennial plants, flowers, grasses, and trees.

From April through September, Yoga Gardens provides free weekly yoga classes to local residents ages 4 and up. Since the garden opened, more than 100 neighbors have attended the yoga sessions. "Classes were packed full last summer, and we had to add two yoga classes just to accommodate the demand," says Solomon, vice president of the organization.

As part of the nonprofit's nutritional mission, Yoga Gardens staff works with volunteers and neighbors to plant and maintain the vegetable and herb garden. As the produce becomes ready, yoga students and local residents pick up a portion of the harvest weekly. Last year, crops produced about 500 pounds of fresh food for local residents. "As yogis, we feel that healthy food is a right, not a luxury," says Harrison, a certified yoga teacher.

## NEIGHBORLY LOVE

About 23.5 million Americans live in food deserts—areas that lack access to affordable fruits, vegetables, and other healthful foods—according to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). Here are steps to helping these communities:

### 1 Find a food desert near you.

Enter your zip code in the USDA's Food Desert Locator.

[ers.usda.gov/data/fooddesert](http://ers.usda.gov/data/fooddesert)

### 2 Volunteer at community gardens.

The American Community Gardening Association provides lists and maps of community gardens, so you can locate those near food deserts that may donate fresh food to neighbors in need.

[communitygarden.org/find-a-garden](http://communitygarden.org/find-a-garden)

### 3 Donate fresh produce.

Find food banks, soup kitchens, and other organizations fighting hunger through Food Pantries or Feeding America.

[foodpantries.org](http://foodpantries.org)

[feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank](http://feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank)





To extend the benefits of their work, Yoga Gardens staff encourages students to practice yoga at home as well as cultivate their own produce. "We often have excess seedlings, which we give to interested neighbors and students to grow in their homes or backyards," says Solomon. Teachers then share informal gardening lessons with students before or after yoga class. "We'll officially put a garden program on the schedule this year because the interest was so high last season," Solomon adds.

This type of response to community interests and needs seems to be key to the success of Yoga Gardens. "If a student or resident comes to us with a problem, we think of ways to help," Solomon says. "Unconditional love is the core of this project, which ends up reaching beyond yoga classes and gardening. The end goal is to improve the lives of people who live in underserved communities."

Take Roy Robertson, a 23-year-old lifelong resident of Garfield Park who helped build the neighborhood's yoga garden. In the process, he gained basic gardening and carpentry skills that he

"Unconditional love is the core. This project ends up reaching beyond yoga classes and gardening," says Morr Solomon.

now uses at his part-time job in construction. "It definitely helped open up new doors in my career," says Robertson, who attends college in Chicago. He also tried yoga at Yoga Gardens: "This was my first introduction to yoga, which brings peace, energy, and balance to my life," he says.

Yoga Gardens plans to open a second location in the Bridgeport/Pilsen neighborhood, another economically challenged area of Chicago.



Yoga Gardens  
students practice  
Upward Bow Pose.

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**Flash Tattoos** Sheebani Pack (\$25), [flashtat.com](http://flashtat.com)

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*Practice* **Cozy Orange** Piper Yoga Tank  
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**Teeki** Purple Hazed Hot Pant (\$72), [teeki.com](http://teeki.com)

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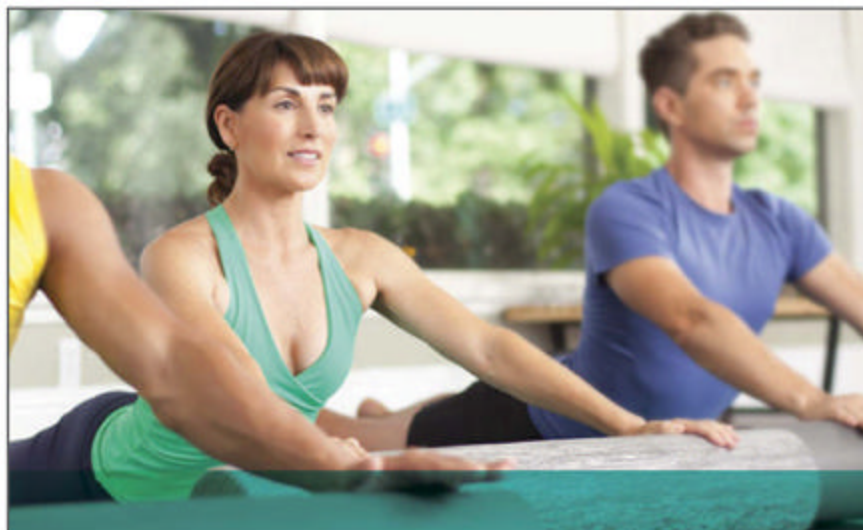
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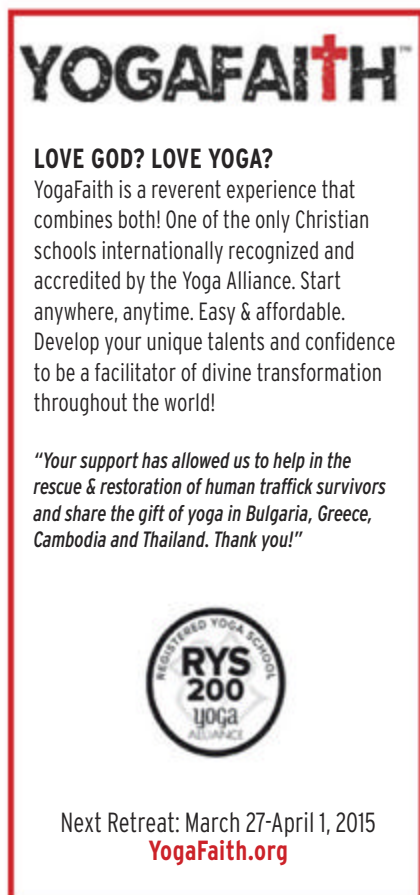
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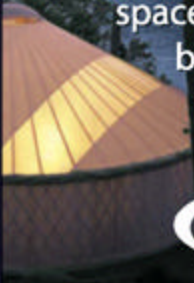
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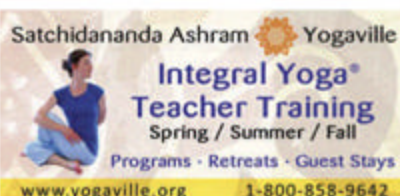
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# rachel roy

Fashion and jewelry designer, philanthropist, and mother of two in Los Angeles

Interview by Dana Meltzer Zepeda

**I first did yoga** after the birth of my first child; she just turned 15. Now I practice for an hour two to three times a week, mostly vinyasa mixed with hatha, with a private instructor. There's great possibility in working with someone who can fine-tune things to your personality and mood and temperament. I know that's not available to everybody, but as someone who has challenges with different types of workouts, I knew it was best for me.

**I developed asthma** when I moved to Manhattan 12 years ago, and it's really difficult to get to the level of cardio that I want. But with yoga, I was able to get those same endorphins a different way. I put myself in poses that were challenging, thinking I couldn't do it, but with the right breathing I could. That became a real symbol of my life: You can get through anything with patience, endurance, and everlasting forgiveness or kindness for yourself.

**I had a really beautiful moment** as a mom two or three days ago. I went to pick up my six-year-old at kindergarten, and I got to go inside her classroom and see some of her work. [For a writing assignment,] her teacher had asked how they get through bad situations, and Tallulah wrote "through breathing." I was so proud of her.

**Incorporating charity** into the workplace is really important to me. For me, it's making products with artisans who live in third-world



## FAVORITE POSE

Virasana (Hero Pose). It's super relaxing, but with that thrust of your heart, it's also a reminder to be open.

countries and don't have the means of distribution. Yoga gives me the patience to make these types of programs happen.

**I had to start** scheduling yoga like meetings. I realized I'm no good to anyone if I don't fill myself up with the things that make me happy, because then I'm like an empty pitcher with nothing to give. When you give to yourself, you're giving up on something else—when you're on vacation, you're giving up on work; when you're at work, you're giving up time with your kids. I don't think you can have it all. But you can have a very mindful balance of choices that are the best for you. 🧘

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